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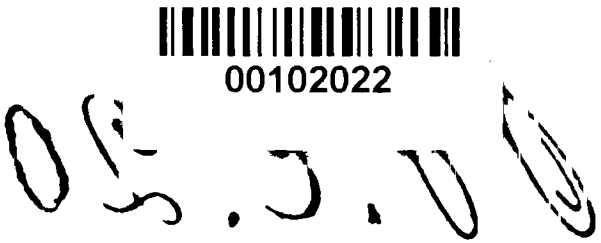

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GOETHE

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GOETHE

102022

BY

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GOETHE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION—BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD.

With peculiar reference to his universality, Goethe has been called the Voltaire of Germany. But the comparison is unjust to him. His genius was of a higher order; and he bears to German literature as a whole, the same relation which Voltaire bears to the French literature of the eighteenth century. In the opening lecture of a remarkable series at the University of Berlin, it was recently stated, broadly and unequivocally, "Goethe has created our literature and our speech. Before him, both were without value on the world-mart of the nations of Europe."[1] Madame de Staël, personally acquainted with his most eminent contemporaries and conversant with their works, says that he might represent the entire literature of his country,—"not that there are not other writers superior to him in some respects, but that alone

[1] Goethe: Vorlesungen gehalten an der Kgl. Universität zu Berlin. Von Herman Grimm. Berlin: 1877

he represents all that distinguishes the German mind (*esprit*), and no one is so remarkable for a kind of imagination to which neither the Italians, the French, nor the English can lay claim."

His countrymen, she goes on to say, are not satisfied with any qualified admission of his superiority. "There is a crowd of people in Germany who would discover genius in the address of a letter directed by him. The admiration for Goethe is a kind of freemasonry, the adepts in which are known to each by catchwords." At the Shakespeare Tricentenary at Stratford, a German gentleman, speaking for a deputation, rose and said that he and his friends had come to do honour to "the *second* greatest poet that ever lived—Goethe being the first."

The books on him or about him would already fill a library; and the cry is still, they come. There are five complete lives—three German, one English, and one French; which, between them, leave nothing to be desired in point of information or research.[1] There are

[1] Goethe's Leben, von Heinrich Viehoff—Erster Theil, 1847; Zweiter Theil, 1848; Dritter Theil, 1849; Vierter Theil, 1850-52. Goethe's Leben, von Johann Wilhelm Schaefer, 2 Bande: 1851. W. Goethe, Ses Œuvres Expliquées par sa Vie, par Alfred Mezières, 2 vols.: Paris, 1872-73. Goethe's Leben und Schriften, von Karl Goedecke: 1874. The Life of Goethe, by George Henry Lewes; third edition: 1875. Mr Lewes's first edition was published in 1855. In the preface to the third he says: "There was, perhaps, some temerity in attempting a 'Life of Goethe' at a time when no German author had undertaken the task; but the reception which my work has met with, even after the appearance of the biographies of Viehoff and Schäfer, is a justification of my temerity." As regards priority of publication, Viehoff preceded him by eight years and Schäfer by four; but his work required no such justification. Taken as a whole, it is an invaluable contribution to critical biography, full to overflowing of knowledge and thought.

also numerous volumes of conversations and correspondence, abounding in personal details mostly communicated by himself. Above all, there is his 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' ('Poetry and Truth'), an Autobiography. This, fragmentary and incomplete as it is, throws a flood of light on the formation of his character as well as on the conception and composition of his works, which, far more than is commonly the case with authors, may be regarded as successive portions of his life. He was not, like his own Tasso, the silk-worm self-producing from within: he drew his inspiration from without,—from the acting, thinking, feeling world around him: he omits no opportunity of stating that he is essentially objective rather than subjective: he invites particular attention to his habit of moulding into a poetic shape everything which vividly affected him; and a large proportion of the most striking scenes and situations in his works of fiction is based on actual adventures of his own. In dealing with such a man and his writings the biographical mode of treatment is obviously the best, as it is also that for which the most abundant materials are at hand.

It is laid down by Mr James Mill, in his Essay on Education, that "as soon as the infant, or rather embryo, begins to feel, the character begins to be formed, and that the habits which are then contracted are the most pervading and operative of all." The accomplished French critic, Sainte-Beuve, maintains that it is not enough to begin with the infancy of the superior man: that when we have the means we should take him in his native country, his ancestry, his race. "The superior man will be recognised, recovered to a certainty, at least

in part, in his parents, in his mother especially; in his sisters also, in his brothers, even in his children."

One might fancy that Goethe had both these theories in his mind, and was eager to supply the means of testing them; for he enters into the most minute details touching his birth, parentage, connections, surroundings and belongings, and carefully analyses the precise amount of influence exercised on him from earliest infancy by each. He begins in the Owen Glendower style, regardless of Harry Percy's sneer,—that the front of heaven would have been full of the same shapes if the maternal cat had kittened:—

"On the 28th of August 1749, at the mid-day stroke of twelve, at Frankfort-on-the-Main, I came into the world. The constellation was auspicious: the Sun stood in the sign of the Virgin, and culminated for the day; Jupiter and Venus had a friendly aspect; Mercury not adverse; Saturn and Mars manifested indifference; only the Moon, then at the full, exercised the power of her reflection, so much the more as she had just reached her planetary hour. She, therefore, opposed my birth, which could not come to pass till this hour had passed. These favourable aspects, of which the astrologists subsequently made great account, probably contributed to my preservation, for through the unskilfulness of the midwife I came like one dead into the world."

He learnt the incidents of his birth from Bettina von Arnim, who had them from his mother:—

"Three days," she writes, "did you deliberate before you came into the world's light, and gave your mother a painful time of it. Out of anger at being compelled to quit your abiding-place, and through the mismanagement of the nurse, you came black all over and without sign of life. They fermented the seat of the heart with wine, quite despairing of your life. Your grandmother stood behind the bed: when

you first opened your eyes she called out, '*Rüthin*,[1] he lives!' Your grandfather, who was a brave townsman and then syndic, always turned hap and mishap to the welfare of the community, and so your difficult birth was the cause of instituting an *accoucheur* for the poor. 'Even in the cradle was he a blessing to mankind!' exclaimed your mother."

A long list might be framed of celebrities whose superiority was due to mothers. "The only inheritance," said Curran, "I could boast of from my poor father, was the very scanty one of an unattractive face and person like his own; and if the world has ever attributed to me something more valuable than face or person, or than earthly wealth, it was that another and a dearer parent gave her child a fortune from the treasure of her own mind." Goethe was more fortunate than Curran. He had reason to be grateful to both parents, and through them to his progenitors. He has summed up his obligations of this kind in verse, the upshot of which is, that he inherited his frame of body and the earnest conduct of life from his father; his joyous temperament and fondness for story-telling (*fabuliren*) from his mother; his devotion to the fair sex from a great-grandfather; and the love of finery and gewgaws from a great-grandmother. He nowhere mentions that the great-grandfather in question was a tailor, and the great grandmother the daughter of one. In fact, in following the ascending line we find no less than three tailors amongst his ancestry.

The utmost diligence of biographers has failed to carry his pedigree higher up than Hans Christian Goethe,

[1] Counsellor's wife. The 'Deutsche Kleinstadter' of Kotzebue has made all readers of German familiar with the custom of giving the wives of functionaries their husbands' official titles.

a farrier of Artern in Thuringia, whose son, Frederick George, became a tailor and settled in Frankfort. He was twice married, and each time to the daughter of a tailor. His second wife, a widow, having brought him in dowry the well-known *Weidenhoff* hotel, he gave up tailoring for innkeeping, which must have been highly profitable, since he was able to give his second son a liberal education and leave him an independent fortune. This son, Johann Caspar, the poet's father, studied jurisprudence at the University of Leipzig, graduated at Giessen, and made the tour of Italy, where he contracted a taste for art. Failing on his return to obtain some municipal employment which he offered to undertake without pay, he out of pique solicited and obtained the rank of Imperial Councillor, which, whilst placing him on a level with the city magistrates, disqualified him from holding office under them.

He was a man of studious habits and reserved disposition, upright, well-meaning, straightforward, and orderly, but better fitted to inspire esteem than affection. In bodily frame he resembled his son, being strongly built, and above the middle height. Lavater wrote under his portrait—"A tolerably good likeness of the eminently able, all-well-ordering, thoughtfully and prudently contriving, but laying-claim-to-not-a-shade-of-poetical-genius, father of the great man." In August 1748, he (Johann Caspar) aspired to and obtained the hand of Catherine Elizabeth Textor, the eldest daughter of the chief magistrate of Frankfort, the bridegroom being thirty-eight and the bride seventeen—a disparity of years which had its effects on the son. "I and my Wolfgang," she would say, "have always held closely together: that is, because

we were both young, and not so wide apart from one another as Wolfgang and his father."

They made common cause against the paternal strictness and gravity, and many an offence against the Imperial Councillor's notions of order and propriety was glossed over or concealed through her connivance; as when, on more than one occasion, she passed off manuscripts containing Goethe's first attempts at poetry as exercises. All the biographers are agreed that she was a woman who could not have failed to attract admiration and inspire interest on her own account. She was the cherished correspondent of many persons eminent for genius or rank, including the Duchess Amalie of Saxe-Weimar; and her letters are full of heart and soul, fancy, feeling, and vivacity. They contain ample proof of the joyousness of which Goethe speaks. "Our free burghers eat, drink, hold music-meetings, dance, and amuse themselves in all manner of ways; and since this makes them happy, God's blessing on it." Again: "Joyousness is the mother of all virtues, according to Götz von Berlichingen; and he is clearly right. When we are content and cheerful, we wish to see all people gratified and gay, and do all we can to make them so." "I have it by God's grace," she wrote in 1785, "that no living soul ever went from me dissatisfied, of whatever rank, age, or sex. I love humankind—old and young feel it. I go without pretension through the world, and that pleases all the sons and daughters of earth. I bemoralise no one, try always to spy out the good side, leaving the bad to Him who made men, and who best understands how to polish off the angles; and by this method I am content and happy." Describing herself when past middle life, she says:—

"I am rather stout, rather corpulent, with brown eyes and hair, and was bold enough to think that I should not make a bad representative of Prince Hamlet's mother. Many persons, the Princess of Dessau among the rest, maintain it was impossible to help seeing that Goethe was my son. I cannot see it; but there must be something in it, because it has been maintained so frequently."

One marked peculiarity which they had in common was the desire of mental calm, and the dislike of agitation and emotion, which both carried to excess. It is told of her that, on hiring a servant, she was wont to stipulate—"You shall tell me nothing terrifying, disquieting, or disagreeable, whether it happens in my house, the neighbourhood, or the town. Once for all, I will know nothing of it. If it concerns me, I shall hear it soon enough. If it does not concern me, I have nothing to do with it. Even if a fire were to break out in the street where I am living, I will not hear of it sooner than I can help." Her instructions and wishes were so strictly carried out by household and friends, that when her son was dangerously ill in 1805, the topic was never mentioned in her presence or by her till his recovery, when she broke silence: "I have known it all along, although I have said, and wished to say, nothing of how ill he has been. Now you may speak out. God and his good constitution have carried him through. Now we may again talk about him without my feeling a stab in the heart at every mention of his name." Goethe's assumed or real indifference to what was passing around without personally affecting him, confirmed the charge against him in after-life that he was deficient in public spirit.

His sensibility to ugliness was manifested at a very

early age. His mother told Bettina that he was reluctant to play with little children unless they were good-looking. "In his third year he suddenly began crying and called out, 'The dark child must be taken away, I can't endure it.' He did not leave off crying till we got home, when I took him to task for his rudeness: he could not get over the child's ugliness." Sainte-Beuve's examples of superior men partly reproduced in sisters are Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Balzac, and Beaumarchais. Goethe is another: his sister Cornelia had many points of character in common with him, and (as his mother relates) he was fondly attached to her from infancy:—

"He carried her all she wanted, wished no one else to feed and nurse her, and was jealous when she was taken out of the cradle in which he watched over her. Then his anger was not to be controlled: he was, generally speaking, more easily roused to anger than to tears."

These family details have been collected from various sources by Viehoff, the earliest of the biographers. The only progenitors named by Goethe are the maternal grandfather, the magistrate, of whom he had reason to be proud—and the paternal grandmother, who, living under the same roof, occupied a large room, to which the children were wont to resort at play-hours:—

"She possessed the art of amusing us with all sorts of trifles, and tickling our palates with all sorts of titbits. One Christmas eve she crowned all her benefits by treating us to a puppet-show, and thus creating a new world in the old house. This unexpected spectacle powerfully attracted the younger spirits: on the boy in particular it made a very strong impression, which echoed (*nachklang*) into a great, long-enduring influence."

The extent of that influence may be collected from the second chapter of 'Wilhelm Meister,' in which Wilhelm gives a detailed account of the Scriptural play acted by the puppets, and his mother exclaims, "How often have I reproached myself for that confounded puppet-play which I gave you for a Christmas present twelve years ago, and which first inspired your taste for the drama!"

CHAPTER II.

EDUCATION AND EARLY IMPRESSIONS.

SIR WALTER SCOTT speaks of Edinburgh as "mine own romantic town." Goethe regarded Frankfort with similar enthusiasm. Its local traditions and historic associations haunted him like a passion. The picturesque streets, the river, the bridge, the city walls, the old houses with their overhanging gables, acted on his imagination like a charm. He gazed reverentially on the spots which had been hallowed by the presence of greatness—the hall in which emperors had been crowned, and the site of the castle which had been occupied by Charlemagne and his suite. His bosom swelled as he stood in the old vaulted hall of the *Rathhaus*, and peopled it afresh with the forms of the grave and reverend signors who had held counsel there. Several pages of the Autobiography are devoted to these local impressions; nor does he omit to mention how food for fancy was supplied at home as well as abroad:—

"In the house my attention was principally drawn to a series of Roman views, engraved by some skilful predecessors of Piranesi, with which my father had adorned an anteroom. Here I saw daily the Piazza del Popolo, the

Coliseum, the interior as well as the exterior of St Peter's, and many other places. These drawings impressed me deeply; and my in other respects laconic father was occasionally pleased to aid me by a description of the subjects."

This laconic father was a man of considerable acquirements, and, having no fixed occupation, was fond of communicating what he knew. To keep his hand in, he gave lessons in composition and Italian to his wife; and so soon as his children were old enough to be taught, he took the principal part of their education on himself, and only employed masters for certain lessons, which are not specified. Indeed, Goethe's account of his education is general and vague; but its efficiency is proved by some of his exercises in his seventh, eighth, and ninth years, fortunately preserved in the Frankfort Library. These are in German, Latin, Greek, and French; and we also know from himself that he learnt Italian incidentally or on the sly. "My father taught my sister Italian in the same room where I had to learn Cellarius by heart. As I was soon ready with my task, and was obliged to keep my place, I listened over my book and mastered Italian, which struck me as a pleasing variety of Latin, very quickly." The learned discoverer of these exercises thinks that the manner of teaching may be seen in them. They are not, he says, mere copies or translations. "No; the father either dictated what had directly struck himself in actual life—a town incident, or an anecdote of old Fritz, which excited the enthusiastic adherent of the great king—or he allowed the son to choose his subject; and we consequently find crowded together childish remarks, poetical effusions, familiar dialogues, and moral reflections, which clearly indicate the direction the adult would take."

The course of domestic education was interrupted in his seventh year by the alteration and partial rebuilding of the house, during which the children were lodged with friends and sent to school. "This change was disagreeable in many respects; for when the children, who had all along been kept at home in a secluded, pure, refined, although strict manner, were thrown among a rude mass of young creatures, they had unexpectedly to suffer everything from the vulgar, bad, and even base, since they lacked all means of self-protection." The house was soon ready to receive them, and their former mode of life was resumed; or, according to some of the biographers, there is no knowing whether Germany would not have had a different Goethe if he had been prepared for the university in the elementary school and the gymnasium. Gervinus plausibly enough contends that his want of sympathy with the masses, from whom he fastidiously held aloof, was owing to his having been too much coddled in his boyhood. But it may well be doubted whether he would have acquired any accession of patriotic feeling or public spirit from the compelled association with such schoolfellows as he describes, although his sensibility and delicacy may have been wounded or impaired by it. There is no reason to suppose that Shelley's genius was materially modified by Eton or Byron's by Harrow.

By quickness of apprehension and tenacious memory, Goethe soon got beyond the instruction he received, without being grounded in anything. He contracted a dislike to grammar, regarding it as only an arbitrary law: the rules struck him as ridiculous, on account of the numerous exceptions, which it was equally necessary

to learn. His dislike to the common run of playfellows did not prevent him from joining a party of boys who met every Sunday to produce and compare verses of their own composition:—

"And here occurred something strange, which long troubled me. I could not help regarding my own poems, be they what they might, as the best. But I soon observed that my competitors, who produced very poor things, were in the same case, and thought no less of themselves; nay, what struck me as still more curious, a good, though for-work-incapable, lad, who got the tutor to make his rhymes, not only held these to be the best, but was fully convinced he had himself made them, as he in perfect honesty declared to me."

The resulting uncertainty as to the soundness of his self-estimate was not dispelled till the specimens were submitted to teachers and elders, and his pronounced to be the best. He says there was no children's library: but among the books that fell in his way and interested him were 'Telemachus,' which, imperfectly as it was rendered into German, had "a sweet and beneficent influence" on his mind; 'Robinson Crusoe;' and Anson's 'Voyage Round the World,' which, in his eyes, "combined the dignity of truth with the rich fancy of fiction." The 'Volksbücher,' or story-books, especially the fairy tales, had an extraordinary fascination for him; and he had just effected the purchase of 'Fortunatus with the Purse and the Wishing-Cap,' when "restlessness and fever gave warning of the smallpox," from which he suffered severely, although it left no permanent mark. He adds that he escaped neither measles nor chicken-pox, nor any other of the tormenting demons of childhood; and these cas-

ualties had the disagreeable consequence of entailing double lessons, on which the father insisted by way of making up for lost time.

Just when the family were quietly settled in their improved residence, the calm was broken, and the boy, for the first time in his life, drawn to grave reflection, by an event which thrilled the civilised world with awe. The earthquake of Lisbon, November 1, 1755, when most of the public buildings and streets, with 50,000 inhabitants, were swallowed up, was far from spending its force on that devoted city. Its devastating effects were felt in Spain, Madeira, Africa, and the Archipelago; and the ruin wrought was so exaggerated by rumour, that "never, perhaps," remarks Goethe, "had the Demon of Terror diffused his shudder so quickly and so powerfully over the earth."

"The boy was not less struck. God, the creator and preserver of heaven and earth, who had been represented to him by the first article of his belief as so wise and merciful, had, in dooming just and unjust to the same destruction, shown Himself by no means fatherlike. Vainly did the young spirit seek to fortify himself against these impressions, which, moreover, was the less possible, because the wise and learned could not agree upon the light in which such a phenomenon was to be regarded."

In illustration of their disagreement, it is enough to mention the famous controversy which originated 'Candide.'

"The following summer," he goes on to say, "gave a nearer opportunity of becoming directly acquainted with the angry God of whom the Old Testament is so communicative."

A hailstorm broke upon the house, shattered the windows, damaged many of the pictures, and so alarmed the household, that all, with the exception of the father, fell upon their knees, and hoped to avert the wrath of heaven by howling and wailing.

On the subject of religious instruction, he says that the Church Protestantism imparted to him with the other children was nothing but a kind of dry morality: "ingenious exposition was not thought of, and the doctrine appealed to neither the understanding nor the heart." He therefore resolved to have a religion, at all events a form of worship, of his own. In the good Old Testament fashion he would build an altar to God; and he accordingly constructed one out of a lacquered music-stand of his father's. Natural productions placed upon it were to be images of the world, over which a flame was to burn, signifying the aspirations of man's heart towards his Maker. The flame was produced by some fumigating pastilles, which he lighted with a burning-glass as soon as the sun rose. The first act of devotion succeeded tolerably well; but at the second sacrifice the altar caught fire, and the accident was accepted as "a warning of the danger there always is in wishing to approach the Deity in such a way."

The Seven Years' War, young as he was (just past seven) when it broke out, exercised, he says, great influence on his life during the whole period of its duration:

"Frederick the Great broke into Saxony with 60,000 men, and, instead of a preliminary declaration of war, issued a manifesto, said to be composed by himself, containing the reasons which had weighed with and justified him in so monstrous a step. The world, which was appealed to not

merely as spectators, but as judges, split at once into two parties, and our family was a type of the great whole."

"The queen, the beauty, sets the world in arms."

But, contrary to what might have been anticipated, Goethe sided with the hero against the heroine, Maria Theresa, who, when the scene opened, was decidedly the more interesting of the two. "I was Prussian, or, more correctly speaking, Fritzish; for what cared we about Prussia? It was the personality of the great king that worked upon all minds." At home, in his own house, all was harmonious enough, for his father was as devoted a partisan of Prussia as he could wish; but at his grandfather's, where he had been in the habit of spending his Sundays, and of thinking them the pleasantest days of the week, there was a complete change of tone, and he was doomed to listen to the cruelest calumnies against his hero without reply:—

"Thus was I thrown back upon myself; and as, in my sixth year, after the earthquake of Lisbon, the goodness became somewhat suspicious, so did I now, on account of Frederick the Great, begin to doubt the justice of the public. My spirit was naturally inclined to reverence, and a great shock was the result of causing my faith in anything venerable to waver. . . . Deliberately reflecting, and at this distance of time, I find here the germ of that disregard, nay, contempt, of the public which clung to me during much of my life, and was only recently moderated down by insight and cultivation."

This is the more extraordinary, because as a boy (he tells us) he had no notion that there were such things as parties, or that he belonged to one, and was always ready to admit the beauty and other good qualities of Maria Theresa.

The most important consequence of the war in its bearings on his position and prospects was the occupation of Frankfort by the French, January 2, 1759, which lasted nearly two years and disarranged the whole current of his life:—

"From the first day there was no lack of constant diversion, especially for children and young people. Plays and balls, parades, and marches through the town, attracted our attention in all directions. The last particularly were always interesting, and the soldier's life seemed to us very merry and agreeable. The residence of the king's lieutenant at our house procured us the advantage of seeing by degrees all the distinguished persons in the French army, and especially of beholding close at hand the leaders whose names had already been made known to us by reputation. Thus we looked from stairs and landing-places, as from galleries, very conveniently upon the generals who passed by."

The king's lieutenant, or commandant, who was quartered on them, was the Count Thorane, a polite, high-bred man, who did his best to render his presence as little disagreeable to the family as he well could. He took a fancy to Goethe, and being an amateur and liberal patron of art, encouraged the boy's incipient taste for pictures. The house was crowded from morning to night with officers, orderlies, and others speaking French, and Goethe rapidly brushed up such knowledge of the language as his prior exercises prove him to have possessed, although he here speaks as if he was then unacquainted with the bare elements:—

"I knew some words of Latin, Italian supplied me with more, and I caught so much in a short time from soldiers and visitors, that if I could not mix in the conversation, I could at least manage some questions and answers. But this

was as nothing compared with the advantage I derived from the theatre."

This was the French theatre set up by the invaders. His grandfather, the head magistrate, gave him a free-admission ticket, of which he daily availed himself, much to the discontent of his father, although with the approval and connivance of his mother. At first, he understood little or nothing of what he heard; but apprehension came with practice, and he hit upon the expedient of learning passages of Racine and reciting them aloud with the best accent he could command. One way or another, he speedily qualified himself for enjoying both tragedy and comedy; and then arose the wish to peep behind the scenes, and see how the representations which fascinated him were got up. Fortune favoured him by throwing in his way, as he lingered in the corridor or waited for the opening before the door, a lad of his own age belonging to the company, with whom he struck up a cordial intimacy:—

"In the earliest days of our acquaintance, he took me with him to the stage, and led me particularly to the green-room, where the actors and actresses remained during the intervals of the performance, and dressed and undressed. The place was neither convenient nor agreeable, for they had squeezed the theatre into a concert room, so that there were no separate chambers for the actors behind the stage. A tolerably large room adjoining, which had formerly served for card-parties, was now mostly used by both sexes in common, who appeared to feel as little ashamed before each other as before us children, if there was not always the strictest propriety in putting on or changing the articles of dress. I had never seen anything of the kind before; and yet from habit, after repeated visits, I soon found it quite natural."

The familiarity thus acquired with the ways of actors and actresses below the highest walks of the profession, was turned to good account in some of the most striking passages of 'Wilhelm Meister.' His young friend had a sister, two years older, to whom must be assigned the honour of inspiring the first fancy resembling love in the poet who was destined to draw so largely on the female heart for his materials of romance. But this damsel contributed nothing to his stock, although he tried all means to please her. "Young maidens," is his just reflection, "look upon themselves as very far in advance of younger lads, and assume an *aunt-like* demeanour towards those who make them the object of a first attachment."

Some half-mythological, half-allegorical pieces produced at this theatre inspired him with a spirit of imitation, and he composed one of which he has no more to say than that the scene was rural, and that there was no lack of kings' daughters, princes, or gods. "Mercury in particular was then so vividly in my mind, that I should be ready to swear still that I had seen him bodily." He submitted a fair copy of this production to his young French friend, who received it with a patronising air, and held out hopes of getting it brought upon the stage, but ended by pointing out so many faults, and suggesting so many alterations, as wellnigh drove the author to despair. These mortifying criticisms were enforced by a running lecture on the unities, and the regularity of the French drama. "He railed at the English and disparaged the Germans; in a word, he propounded to me the whole of that dramatic litany which I was destined to hear so often repeated during my life." Goethe took

back his piece, and worked hard to remodel it to his own satisfaction, but in vain, although his father, after reading it, left off twitting him with his constant attendance at the theatre. This failure set him thinking, and he resolved on sounding these arbitrary rules and canons of criticism to their source:—

"I immediately read Corneille's treatise on the Three Unities, and learnt from it what people would be at: but why they were so eager for it, was by no means so clear to me; and what was worst of all, I fell at once into still greater confusion when I made myself acquainted with the disputes on the 'Cid,' and read the prefaces in which Corneille and Racine are obliged to defend themselves against critics and the public. . . . Through all this I became more perplexed than ever; and after having pestered myself a long time with this talking backwards and forwards, with this theoretical quackery of the previous century, I threw them to the dogs, and cast the rubbish the more resolutely from me, the more I thought I observed that the authors themselves, who had produced excellent things, when they began to talk about them—when they set forth the grounds of their treatment—when they sought to defend, justify, or excuse themselves,—were not always able to hit the right nail upon the head."

The French occupation of Frankfort did not cease till the summer of 1761; but some time prior to that event the authorities had been induced to assign the Count Thorane other quarters; and the Goethe household were enabled to resume their former mode of life. The regular course of study was recommenced and extended. In the next three or four years it included English, Hebrew, drawing, music, fencing, dancing, and riding, to which Goethe added, of his own accord, a smattering of mechanics and natural philosophy. Indeed, no one capable

of communicating knowledge crossed his path, nothing in any way suggestive fell under his notice, without being laid under contribution. He might be found questioning the mechanics engaged in the alterations of the house, as well as the artists employed by the Count; and in reasoning on what he learnt, he was provokingly in advance of his master. In reference to his Biblical readings with Dr Albrecht, the Rector of the Gymnasium, he says that he had long before been struck by the contradictions of the written Word with the actual and possible in nature, and had placed his tutor in sore straits with the sun and moon standing still, not to mention other improbabilities and incongruities. These doubts recurred with added force when he was studying the Old Testament in the original Hebrew; and on his giving free vent to them, the Doctor, more amused than offended—perhaps agreeing more than he cared to own—would exclaim, from time to time, with a meaning laugh, "The mad rogue! the mad youngster!"

The earnestness with which Goethe threw himself upon whatever he undertook, with his facility in getting up subject after subject or running them abreast, may be inferred from the interest he inspired in men of special vocations or pursuits, each of whom regarded him as a pupil or follower, and had a career ready for him. One saw in him a predestined man of science; a second, a born artist; a third, an erudite theologian; a fourth, an accomplished courtier; a fifth, a diplomatist; a sixth, a jurisconsult, throwing fresh light on private obligations and international law. His father was bent on his following the law—sufficiently, at all events, to qualify him

for high office in his native town—but unluckily did not proscribe verse-making, insisting merely that the verses should be rhymed. He had such an antipathy to blank verse that he refused to admit Klopstock's 'Messiah' into the house: and it was read by his wife and children by stealth.

CHAPTER III.

FIRST LOVE.

It was Goethe's readiness in rhyming, combined with his fondness for studying all classes of society, that involved him in what threatened to be a gravely compromising adventure, the year before his departure for the University. To amuse a low set to whom he had been casually introduced, and carry out a practical joke, he wrote some verses as coming from one of them, and went to a supper-party at which the mystification was to be followed up. The entertainment was poor, the company dull and noisy; the joke grew stale, and he was beginning to think his evening wasted, when an unexpected incident occurred.

"At a repeated call for more wine, instead of the servant-girl, appeared a maiden of uncommon and (seen in her position) incredible beauty. 'The servant-girl,' she said, after a smiling salute, 'is ill and gone to bed. Can I get you anything?' 'We want wine,' said one of them; 'if you would fetch us a couple of bottles, it would be very kind of you.' 'Pray do, Gretchen,' said another; 'it is only a step.' 'Why not?' she replied, took a couple of empty bottles from the table, and hurried out. Her figure, seen from behind, was still more elegant. The cap sate so nicely upon the little

head, which a slender throat charmingly connected with the neck and shoulders. Everything about her seemed exquisite; and one could follow the whole figure the more calmly when the attention was no longer entirely attracted and enchained by the calm true eyes and the lovely mouth. I reproached my companions with sending out the child alone in the night. They laughed at me; and I was soon comforted by her speedy return, for the wine-shop was just opposite. 'Take a seat,' said one. She did so; but unfortunately not by me. She drank to our health, and soon took her leave, with a warning to us not to stay long, and, above all, not to be so loud; for the mother was just going to bed. It was not her mother, but the mother of our hostess.

"Thenceforth the form of this maiden haunted me, go where I would. It was the first fixed impression a feminine existence had made upon me; and as I could find no pretence for seeing her at her house, I went for love of her to church, and soon discovered where she sate, so that during the long Protestant service I could look my fill of her. I dared not address her as she came out, still less accompany her; and was only too happy when she recognised me, and nodded in answer to my salutation."

He at length contrives a meeting at the house where he first saw her; and after listening to a poetical love-letter, supposed to be addressed by a young woman to a young man, she remarks—

"'It is very pretty; but what a pity that it is not destined to be actually used!' 'That certainly is much to be wished,' I replied. 'How happy would he be who received such an assurance of her liking from a maiden whom he loved to distraction!' 'That is a serious question,' she replied, 'and yet much becomes possible.' 'For example,' I continued, 'if one who knows, esteems, honours, and adores you, were to lay such a letter before you, what would you do?' I pushed back the paper, which she had already pushed towards me. She smiled, reflected a moment, took

the pen and signed her name. I was beside myself with transport, sprang up, and was about to embrace her. 'No kissing!' she said—'that is so commonplace; but love, if it be possible.' I had taken back the paper and put it up. 'No one shall have it,' I exclaimed, 'and the affair is settled. You have saved me.' 'Then complete the salvation,' she cried, 'and be off before the others arrive and see you confused and agitated.' I could not tear myself from her; but she begged me so kindly, taking my right hand in both her own and pressing it affectionately. Tears were in my eyes; I fancied that hers were wet. I pressed my face upon her hands and hurried out. In my life I had never found myself in such a bewilderment."

That she was the Gretchen of 'Faust' is by no means the measure of her influence, which may be traced in the Clärchen of Egmont and other less-known creations of Goethe. The adventure, therefore, must be followed to its close. His reflection on the scene just mentioned was—

"The first inclinations towards love of an unspoilt youth take absolutely a spiritual turn. Nature seems to will that one sex should become sensually perceptive of the good and beautiful in the other. And thus, through the aspect of this maiden, through my inclination to her, was a new world of the beautiful and good opened to me."

For some weeks he saw her daily, and escorted her to pleasure-parties, in which the company was more amusing than select. To prepare her for an approaching ceremony, a coronation, which they were to see together, he came late one evening to her house to instruct her in its forms and history. Thus occupied, he took no note of time; it was already past midnight, when he found that he had forgotten his latch-key, and could not go

home without creating a disturbance. He mentioned his difficulty. "After all," she said, "it is for the best: the company will stay together." The thought had already occurred to her family and visitors:—

"Arrangements were made accordingly. Coffee helped to keep them awake for some hours. But, little by little, the play flagged; the conversation died out; the mother slumbered in her arm-chair; the visitors were nodding; Pylades and his fair one sat together in a corner. She had leaned her head upon his shoulder and fallen asleep; nor did he keep awake long. I sate in the window-corner behind the table, with Gretchen by my side. We conversed in a low tone; but at last she too was overcome by drowsiness, leant her little head upon my shoulder, and was soon sound asleep like the rest. So there was I, the only one awake, in the strangest position, in which I too was unable to resist the friendly brother of death. I fell asleep, and when I awoke it was already bright day. Gretchen was standing before the looking-glass and putting her cap to rights. She was as amiable as ever, and pressed my hand affectionately as I took leave."

He saw the coronation (of which he gives a graphic description) under highly favourable circumstances with Gretchen, and passed the evening, indeed the greater part of the night, with her and his friend Pylades at a restaurant, which friendship and love combined to make a paradise.

"As I left Gretchen at her own door, she kissed me on the forehead. It was the first and last time that she vouchsafed me this favour. The next morning I was still in bed when my mother came in anxious and disturbed. 'Get up,' she said, 'and prepare for something disagreeable. It has been discovered that you are keeping very bad company, and have

been mixed up in the worst and most dangerous transactions. Your father is beside himself, and all we can get from him is to have the affair examined by a third person.'"

On examination it appeared that some of the persons with whom he had unguardedly associated were engaged in a widespread conspiracy to defraud by means of forged documents. He found no difficulty in clearing himself; and his sister brought him the glad intelligence that she had overheard the examiners treating his alleged complicity as a joke. But the shock told upon both mind and body: he took to his bed with a fever which threatened the brain, and it was deemed prudent that the ex-tutor of a friend should occupy an adjoining chamber, to watch over him. One main cause of racking anxiety was uncertainty about Gretchen and her friends. The young men, he was assured, were found to be quite innocent, having been only incidentally acquainted with the criminals.

"After this I could contain myself no longer, and asked what had become of Gretchen, to whom I once for all acknowledged the strongest attachment. My friend shook his head and smiled. 'Make yourself easy,' he continued; 'this girl has stood it out well, and came off triumphantly. Nothing but what is good and nice could be discovered in her; the examiners themselves were moved by her, and could not refuse the permission to leave the town which she desired. Even what she confessed touching you, my friend, does her honour. I have read her deposition in the secret notes and seen her signature.' 'The signature,' I exclaimed, 'which makes me so happy and wretched! What, then, has she confessed? What has she signed?' My friend hesitated to answer, but the cheerfulness of his look showed me that he was keeping back nothing dangerous. 'If you must know, then,' he at last continued, 'when she was asked

about you and yours, she said quite frankly, "I cannot deny that I have seen him often and with pleasure, but I have always treated him as a child, and my inclination towards him was truly sisterly. On many occasions I have given him good advice, and instead of instigating him to any double-dealing, I have prevented him from taking part in wanton tricks which might have brought him into trouble."'"

Byron—so Moore relates—was told of, or overheard, Miss Chaworth saying to her maid, "Do you think I could care anything for that lame boy?" "This speech, as he himself described it, was like a shot through his heart. Though it was late at night when he heard it, he instantly dashed out of the house (Annesley), and, scarcely knowing whither he ran, never stopped till he found himself at Newstead." Goethe was similarly affected by Gretchen's manner of regarding him:—

"My friend went on making her speak like a governess; but I had long left off listening to him—for that she had formally declared me a child, I took dreadfully ill, and believed myself cured at once of all passion for her; nay, I testily assured my friend that all was over now. What is more, I left off speaking of her, never mentioned her name, although I could not leave off the bad habit of thinking about her, of recalling her form, her air, her demeanour—although now, in fact, all appeared to me in quite a different light. Her cold and reserved manner, which had been so charming before, now seemed just the contrary; the familiarities which she had allowed herself to take with me, but not permitted me to return, were altogether odious. My understanding was convinced, and I believed I must cast her off; but her image gave me the lie as often as it hovered before me, which, to say the truth, was very often."

He was now in his fifteenth year; and to shake off the mortifying reflection of having been treated as a child,

he sprang up and resolved to be a man. His friend pressed him to try philosophy; but he objected, that whatever was worthy of the name was included in religion and poetry:—

"What pleased me most in the most ancient men and schools was that poetry, religion, and philosophy were blended into one; and I maintained that first opinion of mine the more confidently, because what struck me as confirmatory proof was afforded by the Book of Job, the Song of Solomon, and the Proverbs, as well as by the lays of Orpheus and Hesiod."

Philosophy proving inefficient, as it commonly does prove when most wanted, he fled, like the wounded hart, to the deepest recesses of the woods, and finding a spot shaded by aged oaks and beeches, he exclaims:—

"Oh, why did not this precious spot lie in a deeper wilderness? Why could we not train a hedge about it, to hallow and separate it and ourselves from the world? Assuredly there is no more beautiful adoration of the divinity than this which needs no image, which springs up in our bosoms from the mere communion with Nature."

This is an anticipation of one of the finest passages in 'Faust:'—

"Thou gavest me glorious Nature for a kingdom, with power to feel, to enjoy her. It is not merely a cold, wandering visit that thou permittest me; thou grudgest me not to look into her deep bosom as into the bosom of a friend."

His impressibility was boundless; but he was not meant for solitary musings. His appropriate source of inspiration was the world: his warmest sympathies were with mankind and womankind; and he soon grew tired of communing with the trees:—

"My heart was, however, too much disordered to be able to calm down: it had loved—the object was torn from it; it had lived—and life was embittered to it. A friend who makes it too perceptible that he wishes to mould you, excites no pleasure; whilst a woman, who moulds you whilst she seems to be spoiling you, is adored as a heavenly, joy-bringing being. But that form, in which the idea of beauty was manifested to me, had vanished far away; it visited me often under the shadows of my oaks, but I could not hold it fast, and I felt a powerful impulse to seek something like it in the distance."

He obtained a partial distraction from the haunting image by cultivating his taste (it hardly ever amounted to talent) for drawing:—

"For this I was wanting in nothing less than everything; yet I obstinately persisted, without any technical means, in the attempt to imitate the finest things that met my eye. I thereby acquired, it is true, a great attention to the objects; but I seized them only as a whole, in so far as they produced an effect: and even so little as Nature had destined me for a descriptive poet, would she grant me the capacity of a draughtsman for details."

His father encouraged this taste, more with the view of bringing him back to a sound state of mind than in the hope of his succeeding as an artist; and he made a sketching tour with the tutor, which, he admits, produced nothing worth talking about in the way of landscape or sketch. A sympathising sister is the never-failing resource of a young lover, happy or unhappy, who wishes, as a matter of course, to be eternally talking about his beloved; but it was not till after more than one sketching tour that Goethe suddenly discovered what a fund of consolation was in store for him in this shape. "From

such excursions—half for pleasure, half for art—which could be speedily completed, and often repeated, I was, however, drawn back to home, and, in fact, by an object which strongly attracted me at all times,—this was my sister." The attraction became so strong about this time, that he framed "the conception of a poetical whole, in which it might be possible to represent her individuality." But he could think of no other form than the Richardson form of romance:—

"Only by the minutest detail, by endless individualities, which all bear vividly the character of the whole, and, insomuch as they spring from a wonderful depth, give a foreboding of that depth—only in such manner would it in some sort have been possible to convey a notion of this remarkable personality. But from this fair and pious project, as from so many others, I was drawn away by the tumult of the world; and now nothing remains to me but to call up for a moment the shade of that blessed spirit as by the aid of a magic mirror."

CHAPTER IV.

UNIVERSITY LIFE, LEIPZIG.

THE time was now approaching when Goethe's University career was to begin. He had a preference for Göttingen, but his father insisted on Leipzig, and it was arranged that he should go to reside there at Michaelmas 1765. He was eager to leave Frankfort, where everything still reminded him painfully of Gretchen. His rambles through the streets had ceased: the public places had become positively disagreeable to him. He never revisited her quarter of the city, nor even once ventured into its vicinity. Was all this a dream? Could she have been, after all, little better than a myth?

The Gretchen episode is despatched by Herr Goedecke in a short paragraph:—

"Before the departure for Leipzig, if we follow 'Poetry and Truth,' mention should be made of Goethe's first inclination and his relation to Gretchen, in whom people have been content to recognise an innkeeper's daughter of Offenbach. But the little idyl, which runs out with a little tragical memorial, seems to rest upon poetical colouring of the young life, although the biographers have taken it upon trust, and poets have been at work upon it."

At the beginning of a chapter headed "The Leipsic Student," Mr Lewes cautions us thus:—

"If the reader has any vivid recollection of the Leipsic chapters in the Autobiography, let me beg him to dismiss them with all haste from his mind. That very work records the inability of recalling the enchanting days of youth 'with the dimmed powers of an aged mind;' and it is evident that the calm narrative of his Excellency J. W. von Goethe very inaccurately represents the actual condition of the raw, wild student, just escaped from the paternal roof, with money which seems unlimited, with the world before him, which his genius is to conquer. His own letters, and the letters of his friends, enable us 'to read between the lines' of the Autobiography, and to read there a very different account."

I regret to be obliged to differ with both Herr Goedecke and Mr Lewes. I cannot regard the affair with Gretchen as an Idyl or Ideal; and after reading carefully between the lines, I have failed to discover the difference or inconsistency against which we are cautioned by Mr Lewes. In fact, the theories of these gentlemen appear to me to contradict one another. If Goethe was incapable of recalling the enchanting days of youth, how could he have been capable of inventing or colouring them? The first part of the Autobiography was published in 1811, twenty years before his death, when his powers (as Mr Lewes states in other places) were anything but dimmed. Some of the most brilliant passages of his prose writings, the most redolent of life and vigour, will be found in the fourth part, published amongst his posthumous works. The title, 'Poetry and Truth,' has misled many. A better would have been 'Poetry and Prose'—meaning what he thought, felt, or fancied, as well as what he did, said, or heard. He did not intend

Poetry to be understood as a contrast to Truth. He told Eckermann, "I named the book 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' because it raises itself by higher tendencies from the region of a low reality." His mental creations or illusions were as true as his actions or works. "His account of his life," says Jean Paul, "shows us that his Truth was not Poetry, but his Poetry Truth, and that his poetical works are as truly children of his heart as his moral ones."

If these early and most important chapters are to be rejected, how are we to deal with the rest? He states distinctly, in one of the Leipzig chapters (the seventh) that he required for all his compositions a basis of truth, and that he had there contracted a practice from which he could not deviate his whole life through—namely, that of converting everything that gladdened, or troubled, or otherwise occupied him, into an image, a poem, so as to rectify his conceptions of external objects and come to a definite conclusion regarding them:—

"The faculty of doing this was to nobody more necessary than to me, whose nature was always flinging me from one extreme to another. All which thence have become known of me are only fragments of a great confession, to complete which this little book is a venturesome attempt."[1]

How, then, can we fling it aside as untrustworthy? Is the great Confession itself to be regarded as a series of mystifications?

[1] "Alles was daher von mir bekannt gewarden, sind nur Bruchstücke einer grossen Confession, welche vollständig zu machen dieses Büchlein ein gewagter Versuch ist." Surely this important passage should be given as it stands. Mr Lewes, separating the first portion from the context, says, "He has told us emphatically that *all his works* are but fragments of the grand confession of his life."

Neither, as might be inferred from Mr Lewes's warning, is there the semblance of an attempt by his Excellency to keep back or gloss over the follies and weaknesses of the raw, wild student, who, by the way, was anything but raw. Thus, speaking of the practical jokes which were in vogue, he says,—"To enliven the endless *ennui* of daily life, I played off such tricks without number, partly without any aim at all, partly in the service of my friends, whom I liked to please." He adds, that he seriously offended the professor of jurisprudence, whose wife had been particularly kind to him, by drawing caricatures of the bigwigs during lecture time on the margin of his note-book, instead of putting it to its legitimate use. Again, speaking of his friend Beyrisch, famous for mimicry and buffoonery :—

"We lavished our precious time on such harmless fooleries, during which it occurred to none of us that something would accidentally get wind out of our own circle, which would awaken a general sensation, and bring us into not the best repute."

It was precisely this something which did get wind, was the subject of epistolary gossip at the time, and has now been reproduced as a detection or discovery to discredit the Confession, which it virtually confirms.[1]

The *pièces justificatives* on which Herr Goedecke and Mr Lewes principally if not exclusively rely, are two letters from a Frankfort student, named Horn, who entered the University of Leipzig some months later than Goethe, and naturally found his townsman much

1 "Nowhere do we admit a violation of the true colouring. Where new scenes turn up, they mostly confirm Goethe's narrative." —Herman Grimm, Lect. II.

changed. Piqued at the altered nature of their intimacy, without waiting to look beneath the surface or ascertain how matters really stood, he writes (August 12, 1766) to one Moors at Frankfort:—

"To speak of our Goethe! He is still the same proud fantastic personage as when I came hither. If you only saw him, you would either be mad with anger or burst with laughter. I cannot at all understand how a man can so quickly transform himself. His manners and his whole bearing, at present, are as different as possible from his former behaviour. Over and above his pride, he is a dandy; and all his clothes, handsome as they are, are in so odd a taste that they make him conspicuous amongst the students. But this is indifferent to him; one may remonstrate with him for his folly as much as one likes. All his thought and effort is only to please himself and his lady-love. In every circle he makes himself more ridiculous than agreeable. Merely because the lady admires it, he has put on tricks and gestures that one cannot possibly refrain from laughing at. His society is every day more intolerable to me; and he, too, tries to avoid me whenever he can. I am too plain a man for him to walk across the street with me. . . . Goethe is not the first who has made a fool of himself to please his Dulcinea. She is the most absurd creature in the world. Her *mine coquette avec un air hautain* is all with which she has bewitched Goethe."

In less than two months Horn discovers that he has completely mistaken Goethe, and done him gross injustice. In October he writes to the same correspondent:—

"How glad you will be to learn that we have lost no friend in our Goethe, as we falsely supposed! He is in love, it is true—he has confessed it to me, and will confess it to you. He loves, but not that young lady I suspected him of loving. He loves a girl beneath him in rank, but a girl

whom—I think I do not say too much—you would yourself love if you saw her. . . . Meanwhile he is supposed to be in love with the Fraulein—(but what do you care about her name?)—and people are fond of teasing him about her. . . . I pity him and his good heart, which really must be in a very melancholy condition, since he loves the most virtuous and perfect of girls without hope."

This was Aennchen. The lady whom he used as a blind has not been identified; but we know that the women of society—Leipzig society—whom he was most anxious to please, were not at all likely to be pleased by affected finery or singularity; and the oddity of his dress was the disproof, instead of the proof, of his alleged dandyism. It was a fancy of his father's to have tailors as domestics, whose spare time could be turned to account in making clothes for the family. Excellent cloth and other materials were provided. But the cutting and shaping, as well as the sewing, were done at home; and as the things were made at odd intervals, whether they were wanted or not, and laid up in store, the fashion they followed, if they followed any, was commonly one that had passed away before they came into wear. Rigged out from such a repertory, Goethe, starting for the University, may well have recalled the figure of Moses Primrose starting for the fair:—

"My wardrobe was very complete and respectable, and there was even a laced suit amongst the rest. Already accustomed to this kind of outfit, I thought myself sufficiently well dressed; but it was not long before my female friends convinced me, at first by gentle raillery, then by sensible remonstrances, that I looked as if I had dropped down from another planet."

Much as he felt vexed about it, he did not see at first how it could be helped: but when the favourite low-

comedy actor appeared in the same costume at the theatre, and was received with shouts of laughter, there was no longer room for hesitation; and, regardless of expense, he exchanged his whole wardrobe for one of a more modern cut—"but of course," he adds, "the extent of it was very much shrunk in the operation." He had next to get rid of sundry provincial peculiarities of dialect, which he threw off with difficulty and surrendered with reluctance. "Leipzig is the place for me!" exclaimed Frosch in Auerbach's cellar; "it is a little Paris, and gives its folks a finish." In reference to the refinements in dress and speech forced upon him, Goethe says, —"In Leipzig, a student could hardly be otherwise than polite as soon as he wished to stand on any footing at all with the rich, well-bred, and punctilious inhabitants." His principal female instructor in manners was Madame Boehme, the wife of the professor, who also took upon herself the regulation of his taste in literature and poetry; but it would seem that she only succeeded in bewildering him:—

"This uncertainty of taste and judgment disquieted me more and more every day, so that at last I fell into despair. I had brought with me those of my youthful labours which I thought the best, partly because I hoped to get some credit for them, partly that I might be able to test my progress with greater certainty; but I found myself in the miserable situation in which one is placed when a complete change of mind is required, a renunciation of all that one has hitherto loved and found good. However, after some time and many struggles, I conceived so great a contempt for my labours, begun and ended, that one day I burnt up poetry and prose, plans, sketches, and projects, all together, on the kitchen hearth, and threw our good old landlady into no small fright and anxiety by the smoke which filled the house."

CHAPTER V.

SECOND LOVE AND FIRST DRAMA.

"EVEN, then, before this splendid orb [Chatham] was entirely set, and while the western horizon was in a blaze with his descending glory, on the opposite quarter of the heaven arose another luminary [Charles Townshend], and for his hour became lord of the ascendant."[1] The same image has been curiously applied by Goethe. "It is a most agreeable sensation when a new attachment begins to rise within us, before the old one has wholly subsided; even as it is an agreeable sight to behold the moon rising on the opposite side of the horizon to the setting sun, and we rejoice at the double illumination afforded by the two luminaries of heaven." This was a sensation which he frequently procured for himself. Nor was he commonly over-scrupulous in being off with the old love before he was on with the new. Gretchen, however, had no reason to complain of being hastily superseded; for it was some months after his arrival at Leipzig that he was captivated by her successor, a damsel in the same rank of life. After mentioning his change of boarding-house for the sake of Schlosser's

[1] Burke: Speech on American Taxation.

society, he states that he remained with the same people after Schlosser's departure, partly because he liked the company, partly because he was very much pleased with the daughter of the house, a pretty, nice girl; "and I had opportunities of exchanging friendly glances, a gratification which, since the mishap with Gretchen, I had neither sought nor by any lucky chance met with." A little further on he says:—

"I had now transferred my early liking for Gretchen to one Anney (Aennchen), of whom I know not that I can say more than that she was young, pretty, gay, lovable, and so agreeable that she well deserved to be set up for a time in the shrine of the heart as a little saint, the object of all that adoration which it is often pleasanter to offer than to receive."

Was he thinking of the French maxim, "Le plaisir de l'amour est d'aimer, et l'on est plus heureux par la passion que l'on a, que par celle que l'on donne"? As her domestic duties kept her much at home, he had ample opportunities of playing upon her affections, which, by his own avowal, he cruelly abused:—

"I thought I might vent on her my ill-humour at the disappointment of my poetic aspirations, at the apparent impossibility of making up my mind about them, and at everything that annoyed me in any way, because she really loved me from her heart, and did all in her power to please me. I destroyed for both of us our most delightful days by groundless and absurd jealousies."

She bore with him like an angel, till the chord was strained to the uttermost point of tension, when it snapped. Her heart was alienated by his unceasing caprices, and all love on her side was at an end. Then

the tables were turned: he took up the part which she had played so long in vain, and tried to win her back by fondness. But it was too late. She was lost to him irretrievably; and the penances he inflicted upon himself by way of punishment contributed, he says, very much to the bodily diseases which embittered some of the best years of his life. "Indeed I should perchance have been completely ruined by this loss had not my poetical talent here proved especially helpful with its healing powers." He found relief in dramatising the adventure. "From this sprang the oldest of my surviving dramatic works, the little piece 'Die Laune des Verliebten' ('The Lover's Caprice'), in the simple construction of which may be perceived the pressure of a seething passion." The *dramatis personæ* are two pairs of lovers; one happy and content,—the other agitated and uneasy through the unreasonable exactions of the swain, Eridon, who is cast down, and melancholy, when his mistress, Amine, is out of spirits — jealous and irritable when she is singing or dancing joyously. "She loves you," says the female friend, Egle, "more than a woman's heart ever loved."—"And loves dancing, amusement, merriment, more than me."—"He who can't endure that, may love our mothers." Her friend recommends a scheme which seldom fails in such a case:—

"So long as he has no real ground for uneasiness, he will fancy one: he sees that you love nothing better upon earth, and doubts solely because you give him nothing to doubt about. Let him see that you could do without him. He will rave, but that will not last long. Then will a look delight him more than a kiss now. Make him tremble, and you will make him happy."

Amine is unequal to the task, and her friend hits upon another mode of setting matters right. In order to prove to Eridon how little passing familiarities have to do with affection, she seduces him into a tender situation with herself. Amine enters: Egle tells her what has just taken place: Eridon owns that he has been all along in the wrong; and the curtain falls upon a reconciliation which is meant to be lasting and complete.

In Eridon, English readers will at once recognise Faulkland (in 'The Rivals') which Sheridan also drew from life. The character was understood to embody his own feelings during the courtship of his first wife; and it is drawn with more force than that of Goethe's hero, in whom it would be difficult to discover the traces of the seething passion of which he speaks. The discontent of Eridon at his mistress's high spirits, away from him, is improved upon in 'The Rivals':—

"*Faulkland.* Why, Jack, have I been the joy and spirit of the company?

Absolute. No, indeed, you have not.

Faulkland. Have I been lively and entertaining?

Absolute. Oh, upon my word, I acquit you.

Faulkland. Have I been full of wit and humour?

Absolute. No; to do you justice, you have been confoundedly stupid indeed."

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND DRAMA.

THE next, in point of time, of Goethe's completed dramas —for he planned and made some progress in many which he let drop—was 'Die Mitschuldigen' ('The Accomplices'), suggested by the experience and trains of feeling which his adventure with the Gretchen set had forced upon him. That he had been unconsciously associating with criminals, inspired him with general apprehension and distrust. He fancied a skeleton in every closet; and his suspicions, it would seem, were only too often in accordance with the facts:—

"Religion, morality, law, rank, social relations, customs—all govern only the surface of city existence. How many families had I not already, nearer and further off, seen either precipitated into ruin by bankruptcy, divorces, seduced daughters, murder, burglaries, poisonings, or with difficulty holding out upon the brink; and, young as I was, how often had I lent a hand for salvation or for help!"

The *dramatis personæ* are an innkeeper; his daughter Sophie; her husband Soller, a scapegrace and gambler; and Alcest, a favoured lover of Sophie prior to her marriage, who has taken up his quarters in the house in

the hope of renewing their intimacy. The innkeeper is an inveterate newsmonger and busybody, a regular Paul Pry, who cannot sleep for thinking of a letter just received by Alcest with an official seal. Alcest, with some difficulty, has prevailed on Sophie to pay him a visit on his return from a ball. The principal scene is laid in his room. Enter first, Soller, who breaks open Alcest's desk, and appropriates a large sum in gold. He hears some one coming, and takes refuge in the alcove. It is the innkeeper in search of the letter, who, after looking for it in vain, is similarly alarmed by the sound of a footstep, and hurries away, after dropping his night-candle. Enter next, Sophie, who, watched and overheard by her husband in the alcove, soliloquises on the imprudent step she has taken in coming, till Alcest returns from the ball and proceeds to press his suit with a warmth befitting the occasion. But the ensuing situation falls far short of the celebrated one which the fine world of Paris and London crowded to applaud in 'Nos Intimes.' The lady refuses to transgress the strictest rules of propriety, for his sake as well as her own, and breaks from him, exclaiming, "I go because I love you. I should lose a friend if I stayed."

This drama is entitled a comedy, and the comic element consists mainly in the situations after Alcest announces that he has been robbed. The father suspects the daughter, and the daughter the father. Soller alone can clear up the mystery, which he does involuntarily by betraying to Alcest his knowledge of the rendezvous with his wife. Alcest is only too ready to condone the theft; and after mutual explanations between all parties, "forgive and forget" is the order of the day.

Goethe says of this play, "The plainly expressed lawless transactions jar against the æsthetic and moral feeling; and for that reason the piece could find no admirers on the German stage, although the imitations of it, which steered clear of these rocks, were received with favour." He maintains, however, that both of these, his first dramatic productions, were composed from a higher point of view, although he was not aware of it. They point, he thinks, to a cautious forbearance in moral imputation, and in somewhat broad and coarse touches sportively express that eminent Christian maxim, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." It is far from clear how any such lesson or moral can be deduced from these dramas, any more than from any other representation or exposure of weakness, folly, or vice.

CHAPTER VII.

LITERARY PROGRESS.

GOETHE'S notions of the regular studies of the University, especially of jurisprudence and logic, are pretty nearly those which he has placed in the mouth of Mephistopheles in 'Faust.' His attendance in the lecture-rooms was careless and irregular; and even as regards literature and art, he was long wavering and unfixed. The rival schools embarrassed and irritated him. It was uncertainty as to the real criterion of merit that induced him to commit his juvenile compositions to the flames; and describing his state of mind on the eve of his departure from Leipzig, he says that German literature, and with it his own poetical undertakings, had already, for some time, become strange to him, and that he turned again towards the beloved ancients:—

"These, as ever, still bounded the horizon of my spiritual wishes, like far-off blue mountains, distinct in their outlines and masses, but indistinct in their parts and inward proportions. I made an exchange with Langer, in which I ended by playing Glaucus and Diomed. I gave him whole baskets of German poets and critics, and received in return a number of Greek authors, the reading of which was to enliven me even during the most wearisome convalescence."

This must be set down to waywardness, and it must not be inferred that he did not fully appreciate the rising national literature; for he carefully marks the stages of its growth, and fixes the precise degree of influence which each of its founders exercised on his mind. Schiller, proudly claiming for the German muse the praise of having owed nothing to royal patronage, says:

> "Von dem grössten deutschen Sohne,
> Von des grossen Friedricks Throne,
> Ging sie schutzlos, ungeehrt."[1]

But if she went unhonoured from Frederick's presence, she drew inspiration from his deeds: the glories of his career roused her like a war-trumpet: he set before her a living epic: he supplied subjects for her song: the war-songs of Gleim were owing to him: Kleist wrote, fought, and died under his banner; and the very resistance and emulation he provoked by his preference of the French muse led to the eventual emancipation and independence of the German:—

"The literary epoch in which I was born," says Goethe, "was developed out of the preceding one by the spirit of opposition. The very aversion of Frederick to German was a fortunate thing for the formation of its literary character."

The first step was to get rid of the conventionalities—to study nature as well as criticial rules, and look rather to substance than to form. A transition period is commonly marked by exaggeration or extravagance of some sort; and a strange fashion was accidentally set by Kleist, who, when rallied on account of his lonely

[1] "From the greatest son of Germany, from the throne of the great Frederick, she went unprotected, unhonoured."

walks, laughingly and truly replied that he was not idle, he was image-hunting—"a metaphor," remarks Goethe, "highly appropriate in the mouth of a nobleman and soldier, thinking of men of his own rank who went hare or boar hunting. But we were quite seriously recommended to engage in the image-hunt, which was not altogether fruitless in the end, although the walks and environs of Leipzig were the oddest preserves to beat for poetical game." He joined in the popular chase, and saw no reason to regret the solitary meditations to which it led.

The work which he pronounces the truest production of the Seven Years' War and thoroughly North German, is Lessing's 'Minna von Barnhelm.' As for the 'Laocoon,' "one must be young," he exclaims, "to realise what an effect it worked upon us by transporting us from the region of narrow perception into the free fields of thought." All established criticism was thrown aside, like a worn-out garment; and the admiration with which German art, plastic and written, of the sixteenth century, had been regarded, was exchanged for compassion bordering on contempt. To verify or correct these new ideas, he undertook an expedition to Dresden with exclusive reference to the gallery, which he entered with a feeling of solemnity, resembling that with which a true believer enters a temple or a church. The few days of his stay were devoted to it. He would not even look at the antique statues in the pavilion of the garden, being only too well convinced that much in the paintings alone must remain hidden from him:—

"So I took the Italian masters upon trust, rather than presume to have an insight into them. What I could not

contemplate as nature, or put in the place of nature, or compare with a known object, was without effect upon me. It is the material impression which makes the beginning of even every more elevated connoisseurship."

The ordinary run of connoisseurs or pretenders to taste, destitute of art-training or technical knowledge, will admit, if they are candid, that the pleasure they derive from a picture consists in marking with what degree of truth it represents something they have seen, or realises a preconceived ideal. They would prefer Frith's "Derby Day" or Newton's "Olivia Brought Back to her Home" to the Transfiguration; nor need they be ashamed of owning as much, when they find Goethe avowing a decided preference for the Dutch school, the influence of which may be traced in the homely scenes from domestic life which he was so fond of portraying.

During his stay at Dresden, he lodged at a shoemaker's; and he relates that, on returning to dinner after his first visit to the gallery, he could hardly believe his eyes, for he fancied he saw before him a picture of Ostade so complete that one could almost hang it up:—

"Position of the objects, light, shades, freer tint of the whole, magical keeping—all that one admires in those pictures, I here saw in the actuality. It was the first time that I became aware of, in so high a degree, the gift which I afterwards employed with more consciousness—namely, of seeing nature with the eyes of this or that artist to whose works I had devoted a peculiar attention."

Speaking of Wieland, he says:—

"How many of his brilliant productions belong to the period of my academic years! 'Musarion' made the deepest impression upon me; and I can still recall the time and the

place where I got sight of the first proof-sheets, which Oeser communicated to me. Here it was that I believed I saw the antique living again and fresh."

Winckelmann was another of the master-spirits who aided him in tracing the intersecting confines of literature and art. Goethe and his fellow-students were looking forward eagerly to a meeting with Winckelmann on his return from Italy, when, "like a thunderbolt in a clear sky," the news of his death (by assassination) fell amongst them. "I still remember the spot where I first heard it: it was in the court of the Pleissenburg, not far from the little gate by which we used to go up to Oeser's room. A student came to tell me that Oeser was not to be seen, and the reason why." Oeser was a director of the Academy of Design:—

"His instruction," wrote Goethe, many years after leaving Leipzig, "will influence my whole life. He taught me that beauty is simplicity and repose; and it follows that no youngster can become a master. After him and Shakespeare, Wieland is the only one whom I can acknowledge as my genuine teacher: others had shown me where I fell short —these showed me how I could do better."

Oeser's daughter, Frederica, co-operated with the father in forming him, and was the object of some passing gallantries, of which she made light. She was plain, and knew it; a year older than himself, sharp-witted, and wide-awake—

> "Cupid has not, in all his quiver's choice,
> An arrow for the heart like a sweet voice."

This arrow she had, but made a discreet use of it: her arts of persuasion being uniformly employed to keep her pupil in the right path.

He was suffering from a severe illness during the last weeks of his residence at Leipzig, and fancied he should die young. When, during his leave-taking visit to her father, he mentioned this fear to Frederica by way of appeal to her tenderness, she burst out laughing at what she called the absurd notion of dying in one's twentieth year of consumption.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOME AND STRASBURG.

GOETHE'S final departure from Leipzig took place on the 28th August 1768. His father, who still destined him for the magistracy, could not have been over-pleased at the manner in which his time had been spent at the University; but he was really very ill, and any meditated reproaches were allowed to stand over till his recovery. He had a dull time of it, notwithstanding the sympathising care of his mother and sister: and his letters are full of regrets for the society of Leipzig; there being, he complains, nothing at Frankfort to compare with it —nothing but stupid citizens and uninteresting girls. In this dearth of new objects, he opens a correspondence with his Leipzig love, Aennchen:—

"I need not beg you to remember me; a thousand occasions will arise which must remind you of a man who for two years and a half was part of your family—who indeed often gave you cause for displeasure, but still was always a good lad, and whom it is hoped you will often miss; at least, I often miss you."

She was his senior by three years, and familiar, from her situation in the boarding-house, with the language of

gallantry. It is difficult to fancy her the victim of his caprices at any time; and the tone of his letters implies that the passionate feeling, if ever it existed, was all on his side. On hearing of her engagement to Dr Kahne, an acquaintance of his, he writes to express the joy with which he shall hear of her being in the arms of another, but concludes:—

"If you have anything more to say to me, let me know it through a friend. This is a melancholy entreaty, my best! —you, the only one of all her sex, whom I cannot call friend, for that is an insignificant title compared with what I feel. I wish not to see your writing again, just as I wish not to hear your voice; it is painful enough for me that my dreams are so busy. You shall have one letter more—that promise I will sacredly keep, and so pay a part of my debts; the rest you must forgive me."

This one letter more, dated Frankfort, January 1770, begins:—

"That I live peacefully is all I can say to you of myself; and vigorously, and healthily, and industriously, for I have no woman in my head."

When he had no woman in his head, he was like a dissecting surgeon without a subject. He said of Balzac that each of his best novels seemed dug out of a suffering woman's heart. Balzac might have returned the compliment. In reference to his early fondness for natural history, Goethe says,—"I remember that, when a child, I pulled flowers to pieces to see how the petals were inserted into the calyx, or even plucked birds to observe how the feathers were inserted into the wings." Bettina remarked to Lord Houghton that he treated women much in the same fashion. All his loves, high

and low, were subjected to this kind of vivisection. His powers of fascination were extraordinary; and if, for the purposes of art, he wanted a display of strong emotion, he deepened the passion without scruple or compunction—like the painter engaged on a picture of Christ on the Cross, who, to produce the required expression of physical agony in the model, thrust a spear into his side. The capacity for minute observation under such circumstances implies comparative calmness; and we can fancy Goethe, like the hero in 'L'Homme Blasé,' marking, with finger on pulse, when the required degree of excitement has been reached, and taking good care to stop short of fever-heat. Poetry is a safety-valve for sensibility; if, indeed, the power of giving poetical expression to impassioned sentiments be not a proof that they are the artistic and well-ordered product of the imagination, instead of gushing, warm, fresh, confused and tumultuous from the heart:—

> "What an impostor Genius is!
> How with that strong mimetic art,
> Which is its life and soul, it takes
> All shapes of thought, all hues of heart,
> Nor feels itself one throb it wakes!"

When the famous "Fare Thee Well" appeared, it was regarded as a mere showy effusion; and Moore owns that it so appeared to him till he read Lord Byron's account of the circumstances in which it was composed —"the swell of tender recollections under the influence of which, as he sat one night musing in his study, these stanzas were produced—the tears, as he said, falling fast over the paper as he wrote them." On more occasions than one, the actor on whose breast Mrs Siddons had

thrown herself as Belvidera, found the bosom of his shirt wet with her tears, so thoroughly had she entered into the part. But it was the actress carried away by the force of her own genius, not the suffering woman, who wept. Lord Byron's tears may be similarly accounted for, without denying that he deeply regretted the separation; and he incidentally broaches a theory of artistic sorrow which it is no want of charity to apply to himself: "Madame de Staël has lost one of her young barons, who has been 'carbonated' by a vile Teutonic adjutant, kilt and killed, in a coffee-house at Scrawsenhausen. Corinne is, of course, what all mothers must be, but will, I venture to prophesy, do what few mothers could—write an essay upon it. She cannot exist without a grievance, and somebody to see or read how much grief becomes her." Goethe tells us frankly that he turned everything in the way of adventure or love-affair to account: that he regarded all that befell him with his female acquaintance from the æsthetic point of view, and found that the most effective palliative for a mishap or disappointment was to write about it. If only for this reason, we must follow him through most of the romantic episodes of his life.

CHAPTER IX.

RELIGION AND ALCHEMY.

When, in January 1770, Goethe wrote that he had no woman in his head, he must have meant merely that he was not preoccupied with one; for this is the time when he was under the influence of the Fraulein von Klettenberg—the person, he states, whose conversation and letters originated the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," which he incorporated in 'Wilhelm Meister.' She was a religious friend of his mother's, always on the look-out to do good:—

"She found in me what she wanted—a young, lively creature striving after an unknown balm, who, although he could not think himself an extraordinary sinner, found himself in no comfortable state, and was not altogether sound in body or mind. She interpreted, in her own way, my unrest, my impatience, my longings, searches, musings, and waverings, and did not conceal from me her conviction, but assured me, in downright terms, that it all came from my not being at peace with God. Now I had from youth upwards believed that I stood very well with God; nay, I imagined, after manifold experiences, that He might be actually in arrear to me,—and I was bold enough to believe that I might have something to forgive Him. This conceit was based upon my endless good intentions, which He, as it appeared to me, would have done better to help on."

Whilst he was in this state of mind, he read Arnold's 'History of the Church and Heretics,' which set him right as to some essential points, but left him far removed from what, in any Christian community, would be deemed orthodox. Yet there was much in his creed calculated to sustain the hopes of his fair friend for the salvation of a soul which she despaired of assimilating to her own; for it included a personal God, a personal devil, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption.

If the cabalistic was a disturbing element, she had herself to thank for it, since it was under her auspices that he studied alchemy and natural magic. She had heard of the universal medicine, the panacea for all diseases. "The health of the body was nearly allied to the health of the soul; and could a greater benefit—a greater mercy even for others—be made available than by possessing a means by which so many a pang might be stilled, so many a danger averted?" She had read Welling's 'Opus Mago-cabalisticum,' and was looking about for a friend to assist in the interpretation of the obscure passages, when Goethe eagerly offered his co-operation—small incitement, he says, being needed to inoculate him with the disease. They read the principal books on alchemy and the cognate subjects together; and the fruits may be seen in passages, if not in the original conception, of 'Faust.'

CHAPTER X.

LIFE AT STRASBURG.

WHILST Goethe was whiling away the wearisome hours of illness in these pursuits, his father was impatiently watching for the first hour of his recovery, to send him to Strasburg, to take the required degree in law. He arrived there on the 4th April 1770, and remained till the following August, when he was formally dubbed licentiate, which, it must be presumed, regularly led to the doctorate, although it nowhere appears when the higher title, which he forthwith assumed, was conferred. He learnt, with the assistance of a "coach," just as much law as was necessary to enable him to pass his examination, and (with the exception of some lectures on anatomy) neglected the regular studies of the University even more than he had done at Leipzig, devoting his graver hours to literature and his lighter hours to society. To qualify for the polite circles of Strasburg, he learnt dancing and whist. The question of card-playing is fully considered in a preceding section of the Autobiography; and the conclusion is, that instead of avoiding games, young people should try to acquire skill in them. "Time is infinitely long, and each day a

vessel into which a great deal may be poured, if we will actually fill it up." Johnson laid down broadly that there are few days without hours when time hangs heavy upon hand, and told Boswell, "I am sorry I have not learnt to play at cards. It is very useful in life; it generates kindness and consolidates society." Burke, later in life, expressed the same regret.

Goethe's dancing-master was a Frenchman who had two daughters, both pretty and in their teens. They joined in the lessons as partners, and by their aid he made rapid progress in the waltz. One, the youngest, was engaged—the eldest free; and of course he fell in love with the youngest, while the eldest fell in love with him. Of the many scenes to which this play at cross-purposes gives birth, some passages of the concluding one may suffice. The elder is ill in bed, when Goethe is in the next room with the younger, who dwells upon the mischief he has wrought by falling in love with the wrong one:—

"'Fare you well,' she said, and held out her hand. I trembled. 'Now,' said she, leading me to the door, 'that it may be really the last time we speak to each other, take what I would otherwise have denied to you.' She fell upon my neck and kissed me in the tenderest manner. I flung my arms round her and pressed her to me. At this moment the side-door flew open, and the sister, in a light but becoming night-dress, rushed in and cried, 'You shall not be the only one to take leave of him.' Emilia (the youngest) let me go; and Lucinda (the eldest) clung close to my heart, pressed her black locks on my cheek, and remained some time in this position; and thus I found myself in the very dilemma between the two sisters which Emilia had prophesied to me but a moment before. Lucinda let me loose and looked earnestly in my face. Emilia went to her, but was immediately repulsed; and here began a scene which is yet painful to me

in the recollection, and which, although it really had nothing theatrical about it, but was quite characteristic in a lively young Frenchwoman, *still could only be fully represented on the theatre by a good actress endowed with sensibility.*"

It ends by the elder again rushing on him and half stifling him with kisses. "Now," she exclaimed, "dread my imprecation. Woe upon woe, for ever and ever, upon her who kisses these lips for the first time after me! Try it again if you dare; I know heaven grants my prayer this time. And you, sir, away! away as fast as you can! I flew down the steps," he concludes, "with the firm resolution never to enter the house again."

This sounds more German than French, and the reference to the theatre justifies a suspicion that the incidents have been dramatically worked up. The narrative certainly betrays none of the sobering dimming influence of age.

The most important connection Goethe formed at Strasburg was Herder, through whom he was led to extend his circumscribed range of reading, and was made acquainted "with all the new aspirations and all the tendencies which they seemed to be taking." In the literary club or society to which he belonged, an enthusiasm had sprung up for English authors—Shakespeare, Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, and Ossian. Shakespeare (above all) was the god of their idolatry; and the extent to which it was pushed may be inferred from an oration delivered by Goethe at a meeting of this society. It reads like one of Victor Hugo's effusions, *e.g.*:—

"The first page of his that I read made me his for life; and when I had finished a single play, I stood like one born blind, on whom a miraculous hand bestows sight in a moment.

I saw, I felt, in the most vivid manner, that my existence was infinitely expanded, everything was now unknown to me, and the unwonted light pained my eyes. . . . I did not hesitate a moment about renouncing the classical drama. The unity of place seemed to me irksome as a prison, the unities of action and of time burdensome fetters on our imagination. I sprang into the open air, and felt for the first time that I had hands and feet. And now that I see how much injury the men of rule did me in their dungeon, and how many free souls still crouch there, my heart would burst if I did not declare war against them, and did not seek daily to batter down their towers. . . . Most of these critics object especially to Shakespeare's characters. And I cry, nature, nature !—nothing so natural as Shakespeare's men. There I have them all by the neck. Give me air that I may speak !" [1]

It was more than fifty years from the delivery of this oration that the battle between the classical and the romantic school began in France.

Herder's temper was not conciliatory: his manners were overbearing; and Goethe's admiration of him was mingled with fear of becoming an object of his ridicule or satire :—

"I most carefully concealed from him my interest in certain subjects which had rooted themselves within me, and were by little and little moulding themselves into form. These were 'Götz von Berlichingen' and 'Faust.' The biography of the former had seized my inmost heart. The figure of a rude, well-meaning self-helper, in a wild anarchic time, awakened my deepest sympathy. The significant puppet-show fable of the latter resounded and vibrated many-toned within me. I too had wandered about in all sorts of science, and had early enough been led to see its vanity. I had, moreover, tried all

[1] Lewes, pp. 93, 95.

sorts of ways in real life, and had always returned more unsatisfied and troubled. Now these things, as well as many others, I carried about with me, and delighted myself with them during my solitary hours, but without writing anything down."

Coleridge said that an old Gothic cathedral always looked to him like a petrified religion. Few imaginative men contemplate one without feeling its expanding, elevating effect upon the mind. The influence of the Strasburg cathedral on Goethe's was powerful and lasting. It led to a careful study of Gothic architecture, which, he contends, ought properly to be called German architecture, on the hardly tenable ground that the pointed arch, its distinguishing feature, was first introduced in Germany. He broached this theory in a treatise which Herder afterwards inserted in a pamphlet 'On German Manners and Art.' This was in 1771; and on the strength of it Mr Lewes thinks that, "inasmuch as in England many professed admirers of architecture appear imperfectly acquainted with the history of the revival of the taste for Gothic art, it may not be superfluous to call attention to the fact that Goethe was among the very first to recognise the peculiar beauty of that style, at a period when classical, or pseudo-classical, taste was everywhere dominant." All the accredited historians of architecture (including Mr Fergusson) are agreed that the revival of this taste is due to Horace Walpole, who began the practical illustration of it at Strawberry Hill in 1754. On September 18, 1754, Gray writes to Dr Wharton: "I am glad you enter into the spirit of Strawberry Castle; it has a purity and

propriety of Gothicism in it (with very few exceptions) that I have not seen elsewhere." We may differ with Gray as to the purity and propriety, but the taste for Gothicism must have existed when he thus alluded to it.

A memorable event occurred during Goethe's residence at Strasburg, which, as was his wont, he employed to confirm his principles of art. This was the transit of Marie Antoinette, as a bride, on her road to Paris. In a tone recalling the famous apostrophe of Burke, he says,—"Full well do I remember yet the beautiful and distinguished, bright as imposing, mien of this young princess." Before her arrival, strict orders had been issued that no deformed person, no cripple or loathsome object, should be seen upon her route. But by an extraordinary oversight the tapestry-hangings in the temporary building on the Rhine, where the grand ceremonial of transferring her to the suite of the Dauphin was to take place, represented the history of Jason, Medea, and Creusa. On the left of the throne was seen the bride (Creusa) in the agonies of death, surrounded by sorrowing spectators; on the right, the father, horror-stricken at the murdered children at his feet; whilst the Fury was wafted away in her car drawn by dragons.

"Here all the maxims which I had made my own in Oeser's school were stirring within me. 'What!' I exclaimed, without regarding the bystanders, 'is it—can it be allowed to bring so thoughtlessly before the eyes of a young queen, at her first step in her adopted country, the example of the most horrible marriage that probably was ever consummated? Is there, then, not a man amongst the French architects or decorators who understands that pictures repre-

sent something, that they make impressions, that they raise forebodings? They might as well have sent the most horrible spectre to meet her on the frontier.'"

He would have continued longer in this strain had not his companions hurried him away, telling him that no one cared about the pictures, and that the young princess, if she looked at them, would probably not know what they typified or meant.

CHAPTER XI.

FREDERICA.

To the Strasburg period belongs Goethe's first serious love-affair—the first in which anything approaching to the *bon motif* actuated him, or in which the notion of a permanent union crossed his mind. 'The Vicar of Wakefield' was one of the books with which he was brought acquainted by Herder, who read it aloud to their society, pointing out its peculiar merits, and testing their critical faculties by questions as he proceeded. Goethe was strongly impressed by both scenes and characters; and when he heard that at Sesenheim, within five leagues of Strasburg, there was a Protestant clergyman with a family exactly corresponding to the Primroses, he eagerly closed with the proposal of a fellow-student, an acquaintance of theirs, to be taken to their house. His astonishment at the similarity was extreme. The father, indeed, did not quite come up to the Vicar, but the wife was an improved Mrs Primrose. If the elder daughter was not quite so beautiful as Olivia, she had a fine figure, and more than one of the qualities of her prototype:—

"It was not difficult to put Frederica, the youngest, in the place of Sophia—for little is said of her; it is only taken for

granted that she is lovable, and this girl was truly so. Both sisters wore the almost exploded German costume, as it was called, and it became Frederica to admiration. A short, white, full skirt, with a furbelow—not so long but that the prettiest little feet remained visible to the ankle—a tight white bodice, and a black taffeta apron. There she stood on the boundary between the peasant and the city belle. Slender and light, as if she had nothing to carry, she tripped along, and her neck seemed almost too delicate for the clusters of fair hair on the elegant little head."

To complete the group, a younger son, of somewhat rustic manners and awkward demeanour, came in, on seeing whom Goethe was tempted to exclaim—"And you, too, Moses!"

He spends two days with the family, puts forth his unrivalled powers of pleasing, and goes back to Strasburg day-dreaming about Frederica, who, it may be taken for granted, did not bid him farewell without a sigh. His course of study, such as it was, and even his literary pursuits, now began to weary him; and a nervous affection, which he had not felt at Sesenheim, became more troublesome than before. In this state of mind and body, he happened to be attending a clinical lecture, which the professor concluded in these words:—

"Gentlemen, we have some holidays at hand. Use them to raise your spirits; studies should be pursued not only with earnestness and industry, but with lightness and freedom of mind. Give exercise to your body; wander over the beautiful country on foot and on horseback: the native will find pleasure in the wonted; whilst the foreigner will receive new impressions, and leave a pleasing remembrance of him behind."

This exhortation was so exactly adapted to Goethe's case

that, he says, he accepted it as a voice from heaven. He lost not a moment in hiring a horse, dressing himself in his best, and setting out as fast as he could go for Sesenheim; but it was evening before he started, and it was night before he reached the village inn. On inquiring whether lights were still visible in the parsonage, the landlord told him that the young ladies had only just returned home and (he had heard) expected a stranger:—

"This took me aback; for I wished to be the only one. I hastened thither to be at least, late as it was, the first to appear. I found both sisters sitting before the door. They did not seem much surprised; but I was, when Frederica whispered to Olivia so that I heard it, 'Did I not say so? There he is.' They took me into the sitting-room, and I found a little collation ready. The mother greeted me as an old acquaintance; when, however, the elder sister saw me by candle-light, she burst into a fit of laughter."

This, she afterwards explained, was at seeing his studied attire, in which Frederica saw nothing laughable: the same instinct or second-sight which had anticipated his visit, revealed to her the true motive of his finery. Early the next morning, he takes a long walk with her, in the course of which they plan out the amusements of the day, and occupy themselves very agreeably till the bell summons them to church, where, seated by her side, he did not find a somewhat dry sermon of the father too long. Rapidly as the ensuing hours flew by, there were moments when he was made grave by reflection:—

"Since that impassioned French girl had cursed and hallowed my lips (for every imprecation includes both) I had been on my guard, superstitiously enough, not to kiss a girl, because I was afraid of injuring her in some unheard-of

spiritual way. I therefore overcame every longing by which the young man feels impelled to obtain this significant or insignificant favour. But even in the most correct society a heavy trial awaited me. In games of forfeits, for example, a kiss is frequently enjoined."

He managed to evade the difficulty by offering to pay the penalty in improvised verse, which was willingly accepted by the company; although not altogether complimentary to the lady to be kissed. But resolutions of this kind are as fragile as promises:—

"One evening, when the party had risen from a very well-furnished dinner-table, and the male guests had indulged freely in wine, they sought the shade: the games were begun, and the turn came to forfeits; in the redemption of which, the spirit of fun was carried to excess. I myself heightened these wild jokes by many a comical choice, and Frederica shone by many a wild thought. She appeared to me more charming than ever: all hypochondriacal, superstitious fancies had vanished, and when the opportunity offered of heartily kissing one whom I loved so tenderly, I did not miss it; still less did I deny myself a repetition of this pleasure."

Waltzing followed, and he says he did honour to his dancing-mistress, since Frederica was delighted to find him so good a partner:—

"We kept mostly together, but were obliged to pause, since people were calling to her on every side not to run on so wildly any longer. We compensated ourselves by a lovely walk hand in hand, and in that quiet place by the tenderest embrace and the truest assurances that we loved each other from the bottom of our hearts."

The revel was renewed, and kept up till late. He awoke in the middle of the night feverish and agitated. The vision of the dancing-master's daughter haunted

him. He saw her again, with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes, uttering the curse. He saw Frederica standing opposite to her, benumbed by her gaze, pale, and feeling the effects of that curse of which she knew nothing. He fancied himself standing between them, helpless to repel the avenging spirit that seemed hovering in the air. The thought of Frederica's delicate health gave colour to his fears, and he found small comfort in reflecting how long he had struggled against the temptation, how much pleasure he had denied himself to avoid bringing her within the ban. "But now all was lost and irrecoverable. I believed that I had irreparably injured the being most dear to me; and thus that execration, instead of my throwing it off, was driven from my lips into my own heart." The first rays of the rising sun broke the spell. Superstition, he remarks, like many other illusions, loses much of its power when, instead of flattering, it wounds our vanity; we shake it off with comparative ease when it is to our advantage to be free from it:—

"The sight of Frederica, the consciousness of her love, the cheerfulness of the company—all reproached me with having harboured these birds of ill-omen. I believed I had scared them away for ever. The dear girl's trusting, hourly-increasing tenderness filled me with joy; and I was only too happy that this time at parting, openly before other friends and relatives, she gave me a kiss."

He kept up an active correspondence with her, although unluckily only one of his letters, the first, has been preserved; and he says that her letters were in all respects typical of her:—

"Whether she was relating anything new or alluding to

known occurrences, sketching by a touch or pausing to reflect, it was always as if, going, coming, running, springing with the pen, her step was equally light and true."

There is surely no want of frankness or freshness, no signs of age, in this narrative, which many of his minor poems blend with and confirm. His lightest love-passages are seldom unproductive in this way, and are consequently essential to the complete elucidation of his works. But the verses inspired by Frederica are numerous enough to justify in a collected form the appellation of 'Sesenheimer Lieder-Buchlein' ('The Little Sesenheim Song-book'), as they are termed by Herr Viehoff. Almost every shade and transition of the passion, from its early dawn till it fades away, may be traced in them. Speaking of the period of their greatest intimacy, when, with the sanction of her family, Goethe and Frederica were regularly paired at pleasure-parties, and paid visits to country neighbours together like an engaged couple, he says: "Unexpectedly the love of poetising, which I had not felt for a long time, came back upon me. I wrote several songs to well-known melodies for Frederica. They would have made a nice little volume; few have been preserved; they will easily be found amongst my others." It was after the second visit that his feelings most repeatedly found appropriate expression in verse. That visit is clearly commemorated in the verses beginning:—

> "Mir schlug das Herz: geschwind zu Pferde."
> ("My heart beat: quick, to horse!")

Proposals and vows in verse do not count, or ample evidence of an honourable understanding, if not of a

direct engagement, might be produced. Thus, with a band or sash with roses painted on it:—

"Fühle was diess Herz empfindet
Reiche frei mir deine Hand,
Und das Band, das uns verbindet
Sey kein schwaches Rosenband."

("Feel what this heart feels. Give me frankly your hand, and be the band which binds us no frail band of roses.")

Again, in the verses "An die Erwählte" ("To the Chosen One"), in which he exhorts her to be true, vows he is working solely for her, and tells her he has already discovered the valley with the cottage marked out for them:—

"Hand in Hand, und Lippe auf Lippe,
Liebes Mädchen, bleibe treu."

("Hand in hand, and lip to lip, dear girl, remain true.")

On the eve of his departure from Strasburg, the consciousness that he was not acting quite fairly by her—that in the midst of his professions he was anticipating the inevitable separation—gave him many a pang. The only excuse he can suggest is, that a liking deepens into attachment, and flattering words assume the semblance of promises, before the probable entanglement is foreseen; and that lovers, even when hopeless of a happy issue, cannot make up their minds to part. "This was my case. At the same time that the presence of Frederica fretted me, I knew of nothing pleasanter than, absent, to think of her and correspond with her. Absence made me free, and my whole attachment blossomed up through communication at a distance." This sentiment is expressed in the verses headed "Glück

der Entfernung" ("The Happiness of Absence"). They express the exact reverse of the maxim, *Les absents ont toujours tort.* He could not, however, make up his mind to leave her without a parting interview, of which all but the conclusion is suppressed :—

"When, after mounting my horse, I held out my hand once again, the tears were in her eyes, and I was very ill at ease. I then rode on the footpath towards Drusenheim, and there one of the strangest forebodings came upon me. I saw, not with the eyes of the body but of the mind, myself coming on the same path in an opposite direction, and in a dress which I had never worn: it was grey, with some gold. So soon as I shook off this dream, the form vanished. It is remarkable, however, that eight years afterwards I found myself in the very dress which I had dreamed, and which I wore by accident and not by choice, on the road—the same road—to visit Frederica once again."

It would seem, from this and other indications, that they remained good friends: she uttered no reproaches; and if Lenz's story be true, she was speedily consoled. He boasts that he experienced no difficulty in filling the vacated place in her affections; "it was with us both," he writes to Goethe, "as with Cæsar—*veni, vidi, vici.* Through unconscious causes grew our confidence—and now it is sworn and indissoluble." How long this indissoluble tie lasted does not appear. She died unmarried in 1813. Mr Lewes, who believes that she lent a favourable ear to Lenz, apostrophises her as the German Laura, and talks of making pilgrimages to Sesenheim as to Vaucluse—the example having been set by Näke, a philologist, who visited the hallowed spot in 1822, "dined meditatively at the inn (with a passing reflection that the bill was larger than he anticipated), took

coffee with the pastor's successor, and bore away a sprig of the jessamine which in days long gone by had been tended by the white hands of Frederica." But in the same book in which his emotions are set down, he records a story that she had been seduced by a Catholic priest: a story got up by some injudicious partisan of Goethe to palliate his inconstancy, and resting (we are assured) on no foundation beyond the fact of her having brought up the orphan child of her sister.

Goethe unequivocally admits that the fault was altogether on his side—that he was inexcusably in the wrong. Referring to his state of mind some months after his return home, he writes:—

"She was completely present to me. I always felt that she was wanting to me; and, what was worst of all, I could not forgive myself for my own misfortune. Gretchen had been taken away from me; Annette had left me: now, for the first time, I was guilty. I had wounded the most beautiful heart to its very depths; and the period of a gloomy repentance, with the absence of a refreshing love to which I had grown accustomed, was most agonising—nay, insupportable. *But man must live, and so I took an honest interest in others.*"

In the midst of sentimental woes and literary projects, he was obliged, about this time, to devote some hours of each day to the duties of his profession; for he was formally admitted an advocate in August 1771, and, without quarrelling with his father, could not refuse such practice as was brought to him. It consisted in the preparation of written documents; and the manner in which he acquitted himself may be inferred from the observation of his friend Schlosser, to whom he was boasting of the satisfaction with which one of his prepared pleadings

had been read by the client: "On this occasion, you have displayed more of the author than the advocate. We should never ask whether such a writing will please the client, but whether it will please the judge." If the father really hoped to make a practising lawyer or a staid magistrate of him, the means were singularly ill adapted to the end; for the old man had a secret pride in the son's literary abilities, and was fond of looking over, correcting, and copying his fugitive pieces with an eye to publication, from which Goethe instinctively shrank.

When some one expressed to Dr Johnson a feeling of self-satisfaction in a composition—"That, sir," was the reply, "shows not that your execution is good, but that your conception is petty." It was the exact opposite with Goethe; his execution constantly fell short of his conception or *beau ideal:* he made more than one *auto da fé* of the once-cherished productions of his youth. What he thought good was only communicated to a limited circle; and it was with hesitation and reluctance, aggravated by real difficulties, that he was induced to come fairly, broadly, and openly before the greater public.

There is nothing more curious in the curiosities of literature than the preparation and publication of 'Götz von Berlichingen,' the key-stone of his fame.

CHAPTER XII.

'GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN.'

GOETHE'S constant study of Shakespeare had so enlarged his views, that the contracted space and measured time of the classical drama struck him as unfit for the production of anything of mark. "The life of the brave Götz von Berlichingen, written by himself, impelled me to the historical mode of treatment; and my imagination expanded in such a manner, that even my dramatical form transgressed all theatrical limits, and sought to approximate nearer and nearer to living events." He talked over the subject repeatedly with his sister, who urged him to write down at once what he had in his head :—

"Thus encouraged, I began one morning, without laying down any outline or plan. I wrote the first scenes, and they were read to Cornelia that same evening. She was liberal of applause, but conditionally, as she doubted whether I should continue in the same manner—nay, she avowed a decided disbelief of my perseverance."

This put him on his mettle : he set to work systematically day after day, his mastery of his materials increasing as he went on ; and in about six weeks he had

the gratification of seeing the manuscript complete. He showed it to Merck, who talked it over with understanding and goodwill—and then to Herder, who, not content with declaring loudly and unkindly against it, made it the subject of ridicule in satirical verse:—

"I was not to be turned aside in this fashion, but kept my object steadily in view; the die was cast once for all, and the only question was, how the men were to be most advantageously placed on the board. I saw clearly that, here again, I should look in vain for counsel; and as after some time I could consider my work as by a stranger, I saw clearly that, in the attempt to renounce the unities of time and place, I had infringed on the higher unity, which should be so much the more rigidly observed."

There was a want of harmony and proportion in the parts, and an undue preponderance had been given to the principal female character (Adelaide), from the accident of his falling in love, like another Prometheus, with his own creation whilst at work upon her. The general tone and substance, too, struck him as not national or historical enough. Without altering a word in the original manuscript, he undertook to write the whole over again, and set to work so eagerly, that in a few weeks an entirely remodelled piece lay before him. He says that he used the more despatch because he had no intention ever to print this second "manipulation," but regarded it likewise as an exercise which at some future time might be still further improved upon. Here fortunately he gave ear to the exhortations and remonstrances of Merck, who rallied him unmercifully on his irresolution and fastidiousness—insisting that it was better to test the worth of what he had done, and begin something new if it failed,

than persevere in alterations which were just as likely to be alterations for the worse.

Merck, the son of a Darmstadt apothecary, was at this time Kriegsrath (War-councillor), and about thirty years of age. He was called Mephistopheles Merck, from his mocking, ironical tone, and is supposed to have supplied some touches for the Mephistopheles of Faust; but he was a man of recognised ability, and much esteemed by Goethe, who has left a finished portrait of him.

He was a leading spirit of the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Pressure) school, whose views he forwarded by translations from the English, and by frequent contributions to their organ, the 'Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen,' to which Goethe also contributed. The declared object of this school was to produce a revolution in literature by upsetting not only the unities, but everything that had the sanction of custom or authority. Nature, or what they called Nature, was the only guide worth following; and the more emotional, sensational, or irregular the poem or drama, the better. It was the hope of winning or fixing such a convert as Goethe that added to Merck's eagerness for the publication.

In reply to Merck's exhortations, Goethe urged in objection the disagreeable necessity of offering a work on which he had bestowed so much labour to a bookseller, at the risk of a mortifying refusal; adding that, with all his dread of appearing in print, he should ere now have published his drama 'Die Mitschuldigen,' had he been able to find a publisher. To get rid of this difficulty and keep the profits (of which he made no doubt) from the greedy hands of the trade, Merck proposed that they

should share the risk between them: Goethe finding paper and Merck print. This arrangement was carried out; and the author had soon the gratification of seeing proof-sheets of what he calls his wild dramatic sketches, and the still greater gratification of finding that they turned out better than he expected. The publication made a noise: the demand for copies was greater than they with their limited means could supply, and a pirated edition came out in rivalry. The returns for what they sold were slow and uncertain; and Goethe, living on an allowance from his father, was extremely perplexed how to pay for the paper by means of which his genius had become known.

He had already, through some fugitive pieces which he had published anonymously, learned something of the critics, and remarked "how much that was groundless, one-sided, and arbitrary, was recklessly put forth by them." Now the same thing was individually brought home to him; and if, he exclaims, "I had not some basis of my own, how much would the contradictions of cultivated men have perplexed me!" In illustration of the reception and peculiar appreciation of the work by the general public, he mentions the visit of a bookseller who, "with cheerful openness, requested a dozen of such pieces, and promised to pay well for them."

Victor Hugo compared the extravagance of the Romantic school—the *Sturm und Drang* party of France—to the excesses of the Reign of Terror. After the first representation of 'Henri Trois,' they formed a ring by joining hands in the *foyer* of the Théâtre Français, and danced round the bust of Racine, shouting, "*Enfoncé, Racine!—enfoncé, Racine!*" The same sort of enthusi-

asm had been kindled nearly half a century before by the appearance of 'Götz von Berlichingen':—

"As the greatest part of mankind," observes Goethe, "is more excited by the matter or subject than by the treatment, so it was to the subject that the sympathy of young men for my pieces was mostly owing. They thought they saw in them a banner under which all that is wild and unpolished in youth might win its way forwards; and it was precisely the best heads, which had already been haunted by something similar, that were carried away."

The best heads would hardly have been carried along with the undiscerning many, if the pieces to which he alludes ('Götz von Berlichingen' and 'Werther') had not been genuine productions of genius; and it would be difficult to overvalue the importance of a work which forms an epoch in two walks of literature, which revolutionised the German drama, and may plausibly claim to have originated the historical romance of Scott. His translation of Goethe's drama appeared in 1799; and the extent to which his own turn of mind was influenced by it is evident from many pages of his works.[1]

The translation is prefaced by a rapid sketch of the period, which, strange to say, begins with a mistake. "Götz von Berlichingen, the hero of the following drama, flourished in the fifteenth century, during the reign

[1] "In the baronial robbers of the Rhine, Scott had before him a vivid image of the life of his own and the rival Border clans, familiarised to him by a hundred nameless minstrels. If it be doubtful whether, but for Percy's 'Reliques,' he would ever have thought of editing their ballads, I think it not less so whether, but for the Iron-handed Götz, it would ever have flashed upon his mind that, in the wild traditions which these recorded, he has been unconsciously assembling materials for more works of high art than the longest life could serve him to elaborate."—Lockhart's Life of Scott, i. 129.

of Maximilian the First, Emperor of Germany." The career of Götz, born in 1480, properly belongs to the sixteenth century; and the events dramatised occurred, or are supposed to have occurred, shortly before the death of Maximilian in 1518. They arose out of the contest between the emperor and the petty barons, whom he had been endeavouring to bring under control. The greater feudatories and the free towns sided with the emperor; the petty barons, or free knights, made common cause in defence of their privileges, especially that of making private war, or *Faustrecht* (fist-right), as it was termed. Götz von Berlichingen was prominent amongst the barons for gallantry and generosity, as well as lawlessness. In his capacity of robber-chief he had much in common with Robin Hood. His right hand, carried off by a cannon-shot, had been replaced by one of iron, with which he wielded both lance and sword, besides occasionally employing it as a cestus.

When the scene opens, he is at feud with the Bishop of Bamberg and Adelbert von Weislingen, a former friend, and, like himself, a free knight of the empire. His first appearance is in a forest in Franconia, where, with a small retinue of retainers, he is on the look-out for Adelbert. His wife, sister, and son are in anxious expectancy at his castle, when the success of the expedition is announced. He has surprised and taken Adelbert, who is brought in a prisoner, but treated courteously, and allowed on *parole* to form one of the family. They talk over matters and, after some warm discussion, come to an understanding, which is accelerated and completed by Adelbert's plighting his troth to Götz's sister, Maria, one of the gentle, simple, loving creatures who have no

chance against a brilliant, fascinating, seductive, unprincipled woman like Adelaide von Walldorf—a young widow, with whom we are brought acquainted at the court of the Bishop of Bamberg, where a plan is formed to win Adelbert back through her instrumentality :—

"*Bishop.* When he is once here, I must trust to you.
Adelaide. Would you make me your lime-twig?
Bishop. By no means.
Adelaide. Your call-bird, then?
Bishop. No; that is Liebtraut's (the messenger's) part. I beseech you, do not refuse to do for me what no other can.
Adelaide. We shall see."

Adelbert is one of those weak, wavering characters who are the slaves of their passions or their weaknesses. He falls an easy victim to the seductions of Adelaide, and (what perhaps is a little out of keeping), not content with betraying the confidence of Götz, employs all his influence to have the imperial ban rigidly enforced against him. He is with the emperor in a garden at Augsburg, when two merchants of Nuremberg come to complain that Götz and Hans von Selbitz had fallen upon thirty of them as they were returning from the fair of Frankfort under an escort from Bamberg, overpowered, and plundered them :—

"*Emperor.* Good heavens! what is this? The one has but one hand, the other but one leg; if they both had two hands and two legs, what would they not do then?
First Merchant. We most humbly beseech your Majesty to cast a look of compassion upon our unfortunate condition.
Emperor. How is this? If a merchant loses a bag of money, all Germany is to rise in arms; but when business is to be done in which the Imperial Majesty and the empire are interested, there is no bringing you together."

The merchants retire disconsolate, and the emperor expresses an inclination to secure the services of Götz and his one-legged friend instead of proceeding against them. It should be remembered that Götz was at feud with the Nurembergers, and that the merchants came under an escort from his enemy. Another exploit of his in the same line is held up by his wife as an example to his son:—

"*Elizabeth.* Listen: there was a tailor at Stuttgart who was a capital archer, and had gained the prize at Cologne.

Charles. Was it much?

Elizabeth. The tailor came to your father and begged him to get his money for him. Then your father rode out and intercepted a party of merchants from Cologne, and kept them prisoners till they paid the money. Would you not have ridden out too?"

This method of reprisal somewhat resembles that of the Irishman who knocked a man down in Covent Garden because he himself had been knocked down by another in Drury Lane; but it was in keeping with the times. So late as 1571, an emissary of the Elector of Saxony, having been maltreated by some Milanese, the Elector issued letters of marque authorising him, "should he meet with these or *any other* Milanese, to throw them into prison, so that his bodily pains and losses might be made good to him."

Götz's enemies prevail, and a band of Imperialists is despatched to secure him and his castle. A series of skirmishes take place. Selbitz is brought in wounded by two troopers; one of whom, at his bidding, ascends a watch-tower to report the progress of the fight:—

"*Selbitz.* Seest thou Götz?

Trooper. I see his three black feathers floating in the midst. A white plume—whose is that?

Selbitz. The captain's.

Trooper. Götz gallops upon him—crash—down he goes!

Selbitz. The captain?

Trooper. Yes, sir. Alas, alas, I see Götz no more! A dreadful tumult where he stood. George's blue plume vanishes too. Everything is in confusion. Götz is lost.

Selbitz. Come down.

Trooper. I cannot. Hurrah! hurrah! I see Götz! I see George! Victors, victors! they fly!

Selbitz. The Imperialists?

Trooper. Yes, standard and all, Götz after them. They disperse. Götz reaches the ensign; he seizes the standard; he halts."

Referring to this scene, Lockhart exclaims: "Who does not recognise in Goethe's drama the true original of the death-scene in 'Marmion,' and the storm of Torquilstone in 'Ivanhoe'?" This mode of describing a battle, as seen from a vantage-ground, was frequently employed by Scott.

Although victorious in the first encounter, Götz is compelled to take refuge in his castle, where he holds out till his provisions fail, when he makes a desperate sally, which ends in the dispersion of his followers and our shortly finding him before the Imperial Commissioners at Heilbronn:—

"*Com.* You fell into the power of the emperor, whose paternal goodness got the better of his justice, and instead of throwing you into a dungeon, ordered you to repair to his beloved city of Heilbronn. You gave your knightly *parole* to appear and await the termination in all humility.

Götz. Well; I am here, and I await it.

Com. And we are here to intimate to you his Imperial

Majesty's mercy and clemency. He is pleased to forgive your rebellion, to release you from the ban, and all well-merited punishment—provided you do, with becoming humility, receive his bounty, and subscribe to the articles which shall be read unto you."

He assents, and requests the articles to be read to him. They begin by a confession that he has been guilty of rebellion against the emperor, when he starts to his feet, exclaiming, "'Tis false! I am no rebel!" He is threatened with imprisonment for his contumacy; and at length, on a sign from the Commissioner to the magistrate of Heilbronn, enter a party of artisans armed with halberts and swords:—

"*Götz.* What means this?

Com. You will not listen. Seize him!

Götz. Let none come near me who is not a very Hungarian ox. One salutation from my iron fist shall cure him of headache, toothache, and every other ache under the wide heaven. (*They rush upon him. He strikes one down, and snatches a sword from another. They stand aloof.*) Come on! come on! I should like to become acquainted with the bravest of you.

Com. Surrender!

Götz. With a sword in my hand! Know ye not that it depends but upon myself to make my way through all these bands and gain the open field?[1] But I will teach you how a man should keep his word. Promise me but free ward, and I will give up my sword, and am again your prisoner."

The parley is suddenly interrupted by the entrance of a sergeant, who announces that Francis of Sichingen (Götz's brother-in-law) waits at the drawbridge and gives

[1] "I have seen the day
That, with this little arm and this good sword,
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop."—*Othello.*

fair notice that, unless Götz is set free, he will within an hour fire the four quarters of the town, and abandon it to be plundered by his vassals. On the urgent entreaty of the magistrate the Commissioner appeals to Götz :—

"*Com.* Thou wilt do well to dissuade thy brother-in-law from his rebellious interference. Instead of rescuing thee, he will only plunge thee deeper in destruction, and become the companion of thy fall.

Götz (*sees Elizabeth at the door, and speaks to her aside*). Go ; tell him instantly to break in and force his way hither, but to spare the town. As for these rascals, if they offer any resistance, let him use force. I care not if I lose my life, provided they are all knocked on the head at the same time."

He is rescued, and his position may be collected from the opening of the next scene between Adelaide and Weislingen, now man and wife :—

"*Adelaide.* This is detestable.

Weislingen. I have gnashed my teeth. So good a plan—so well followed out ; and after all, to leave him in possession of his castle ! That cursed Sichingen !

Adelaide. The council should not have consented.

Weislingen. They were in the net. What else could they do ? Sichingen threatened them with fire and sword.

Adelaide. Have they no emperor ?

Weislingen. My dear wife, he waxes old and feeble. When he heard what had been done, and I and the other councillors murmured indignantly—'Let them alone,' said he ; 'I can spare my old Götz his little fortress ; and if he remains quiet there, what have you to say against him ?'"

Weislingen draws comfort from the conviction that it will be impossible for Götz to remain quiet, and Adelaide expresses a hope that the emperor's successor, Charles, will display a more princely mind :—

"*Weislingen.* You have a great idea of his abilities: one might almost think you looked on him with partial eyes.

Adelaide. You insult me. For what do you take me?

Weislingen. I do not mean to offend; but I cannot be silent upon the subject. Charles's marked attentions to you disquiet me.

Adelaide. And do I receive them as if——

Weislingen. You are a woman; and no woman hates those who pay court to her.

Adelaide. This from you!"

His suggestion that she should avoid the prince's addresses by leaving the court is put aside with an assurance that he may rely upon her love:—

"*Weislingen.* That is my anchor so long as the cable holds. (*Exit.*)

Adelaide. Ah! is it come to this? This was yet wanting. The projects of my bosom are too great to brook thy interruption. Charles—the great, the gallant Charles—the future emperor,—shall he be the only man unrewarded by my favour? Think not, Weislingen, to hinder me—else shalt thou to earth: my way lies over thee.

Enter FRANCIS *with a letter.*

Francis. Here, gracious lady.

Adelaide. Hadst thou it from Charles's own hand?

Francis. Yes.

Adelaide. What ails thee? Thou look'st so mournful!

Francis. Is it your pleasure that I should pine away, and waste my fairest years in agonising despair?

Adelaide (*aside*). I pity him; and how little would it cost me to make him happy! (*Aloud.*) Be of good courage, youth! I know thy love and fidelity, and will not be ungrateful."

Francis is her husband's page, who has fallen madly in love with her, and is ready to go through fire and water for her sake. Attachment to his master, com-

bined with jealousy, induces him to vow that he will be her slave, her go-between, no longer; but her first reproachful look unmans him:—

"*Francis.* Dear lady, you know how I love you!

Adelaide. And you, who were my friend — so near my heart! Go, betray me.

Francis. Rather would I tear my heart from my breast. Forgive me, gentle lady! my heart is too full—my senses desert me.

Adelaide. Thou dear affectionate boy! (*She takes him by both hands, draws him towards her, and kisses him. He throws himself weeping upon her neck.*) Leave me!

Francis (*his voice choked by tears*). Heavens!

Adelaide. Leave me! The walls are traitors. Leave me! (*Breaks from him.*) Be but steady in fidelity and love, and the fairest reward is thine. (*Exit.*)"

In a subsequent scene, in her bed-chamber, she appears with a letter from her husband in her hand, requiring her to leave the court for his castle. Francis knocks and is admitted. She tells him she is to be immured in a cloister:—

"*Adelaide.* Wilt thou rescue me?

Francis. Anything! Everything!

Adelaide (*throws herself weeping upon his neck*). Francis! Oh save me!

Francis. He shall fall! I will plant my foot upon his neck!

Adelaide. No violence! You shall carry a submissive letter to him announcing obedience. Then give him this phial in his wine.

Francis. Give it me. Thou shalt be free!

Adelaide. Free! And then no more shalt thou need to come to my chamber trembling and in fear. No more shall I need anxiously to say, 'Away, Francis, the morning dawns!'"

He fulfils his mission; and Weislingen is wasting away in his castle from the effects of the poison, when Maria comes to beg his intercession for her brother. He produces the sentence of death formally signed, tears it to pieces, and dies after hearing that the poison was administered by his page at the desire of his wife. This is followed by a scene before the *Vehm Gericht*, in which Adelaide is formally cited and condemned for murder and adultery—a scene which obviously suggested that in 'Anne of Geierstein' where the robber-knight is similarly condemned by the same tribunal. A scene was added, subsequently to Scott's translation, in which the sentence of the secret tribunal is carried out by a sworn executioner of the fraternity after a repulsive struggle with the victim.

We return to Götz, who is represented seated at a table with writing materials; his wife beside him with her work. He is writing his memoirs, and pauses to exclaim, "Alas! writing is but busy idleness. It wearies me. Whilst I am writing what I have done, I lament the misspent time in which I might do more." He is interrupted by news of a widespread insurrection of the peasants, who are burning and plundering far and near. They apply to him to be their leader; and in a weak moment he consents, in breach of his knightly word, in the hope of being able to control their excesses and procure the redress of their wrongs. Their excesses are continued; they refuse to be restrained by his authority; and he is in personal conflict with the most violent, when the Imperial troopers, headed by Weislingen, are upon them, and he is obliged to save himself by flight. He takes refuge in an encampment of gipsies, where the

women bind his wounds, whilst the males arm for his defence. But they are overpowered. He mounts his horse without his armour, and gallops off; and his next and last appearance is in the prison at Heilbronn, where he dies, broken-hearted alike at the untimely fate of his followers and the dishonour of his name:—

"Selbitz is dead, and the good emperor, and my George. Give me a draught of water! Heavenly air! freedom! freedom! (*He dies.*)

Elizabeth. Freedom is above—above with thee! The world is a prison-house.

Maria. Noble man! Woe to this age that rejected thee!

Lerse. And woe to the future that shall misjudge thee!"

"The following drama," remarks Sir Walter, in the preface to his translation, "was written by the elegant author of the 'Sorrows of Werther,' in imitation, it is said, of the manner of Shakespeare. This resemblance is not to be looked for in the style or expression, but in the outline of the characters and mode of conducting the incidents of the piece." There is a certain outward resemblance to some of the historical plays—'Henry VI.,' for instance; but Goethe can hardly be said to have imitated Shakespeare in anything but irregularity, spirit, fertility, and variety. Shakespeare is both dramatic and melodramatic; he combines and attains the highest perfection in both. The tent scene and the battle scene in 'Richard III.' are melodramatic; and I remember Sheridan Knowles calling 'Macbeth' a splendid melodrame. It would be superfluous to give examples of the dramatic. Now Goethe (in 'Götz') rivals Shakespeare in the melodramatic—in incident and situation, in the succession of *tableaux vivants*, by which the imagination is caught

and the interest kept rising till the end. But his chief effects are produced by action. The language, simple and to the point, is part of this action. There are no mental or moral struggles, no unconscious betrayal of motive, no laying bare of the workings of the heart or mind. Weislingen does not soliloquise like Hamlet, nor Adelaide walk and talk in her sleep like Lady Macbeth.

For want of preparation of this kind, the worse than irresolution of Weislingen and the extreme wickedness of Adelaide, when first shown by conduct, come upon us by surprise and have an air of improbability. "Sir," said Dr Johnson, "there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners—and *there* is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson. Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood by a more superficial observer than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart." This was unjust to Fielding, whose Parson Adams and Tom Jones are as natural as Lovelace and Sir Charles Grandison; but it would not be unjust if applied to Shakespeare and Goethe—so far, at least, as the drama before us is concerned. The *dramatis personæ* of Shakespeare's historical plays are mostly taken from history; but, as treated by him, they represent not merely the age and country, but mankind. Nine-tenths of Goethe's are his own creation, and do honour to the exuberant fertility of his genius. They are also finely contrasted and grouped; but they will hardly bear to be taken individually, apart from the period or with the local colouring rubbed off.

What, too, the admirer of Shakespeare will miss in

'Götz' is the poetry. There are few thoughts that breathe or words that burn—no passages that we muse on or commit to memory; yet no reader of 'Faust' will deny that Goethe could have interspersed such passages, or treated the subject dramatically, had he thought fit. Indeed the poet's hand and eye are clearly discernible in scenes like the gipsy encampment, where the light and shade are managed as in one of Rembrandt's masterpieces. Critics have insisted—and their theories have been incidentally favoured by the author—that he meant more than to depict the manners of a period or give a death-blow to the unities. "The real pith or moral of 'Götz' is the idea of the conflict of asserted free-will with the necessary progress of the whole of history." It is further suggested that he sought to illustrate the vanity and uselessness of individual resistance, even by the brave and good, to organised injustice and oppression. But it is clear, from both external and internal evidence, that he dashed off scene after scene without a care for the moral, which, as stated, was hardly worth caring for; and if he really had it in view, he would be open to the charge of falsifying history to point it—for the actual Götz lived to the respectable age of eighty, and died quietly in his castle.

"It is the only great production of Goethe's," remarks Mr Hutton, "in which a really noble self-forgetful *man* stands out in the foreground to give us a moral standard by which to measure the meaner characters. It is the only great production in which awful shadows of remorse haunt the selfish and the guilty." Mr Hutton also suggests that Adelaide "is the only woman in his [Goethe's] works of whom we find no autobiographical trace." It

would be strange if we did; for she has no one redeeming, hardly one feminine, quality: she is the faulty monster that the world ne'er saw, and there is nothing so bad even in fiction, with the exception of Athos's wife in the 'Trois Mousquetaires.'

The originality of the work was contested by Hegel, on the ground that modern topics are introduced in some scenes or passages:—

"An original work appears as the creation of *one* mind which, admitting of no external influence, fuses the whole work in one mould, as the events therein exhibited were fused. If it contains scenes and motives which do not naturally evolve themselves from the original materials, but are brought together from far and wide, then the internal unity becomes necessarily destroyed, and these scenes betray the author's subjectivity."

He instances the scene with brother Martin (meaning Luther), which contains notions gathered from the controversies of Goethe's own day. But if we accept this criterion of originality, there are no original works of the highest class. It would be fatal to Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante. They are one and all open to the charge of subjectivity; as, indeed, what man of genius is not? There can be little doubt that anachronisms will be detected in Homer, when the date of the Trojan war has been fixed.

The features of Goethe's mother have been clearly traced in Elizabeth, the wife of Götz—"the jewel of the piece and of all women," as Zelter calls her. Surely this is no impeachment of originality.

CHAPTER XIII.

WETZLAR, LOTTE (CHARLOTTE BUFF), AND 'WERTHER.'

EARLY in 1772, whilst 'Götz' was still in embryo, Goethe arrived for a temporary residence at Wetzlar, the seat of the *Kammer-gericht* or supreme court of appeal. "In the spring," writes Kestner (the betrothed of Charlotte), "there came here a certain Goethe, by trade a doctor of law, twenty-three years old, only son of a very rich father, in order—this was his father's intention—that he might get some experience in practice; but, according to his own intention, that he might study Homer, Pindar, &c., and whatever his genius, his manner of thinking, and his heart might suggest to him." The same event is thus mentioned by Mr Lewes:—

"In the spring of 1772, he arrived at Wetzlar with 'Götz' in his portfolio, and in his head many wild, unruly thoughts. A passage in the Autobiography amusingly illustrates his conception of the task he had undertaken in choosing to inform the world of his early history. Remember that at Wetzlar he fell in love with Charlotte, and lived through the experience that was fused into 'Werther,' and you will smile as you hear him say, 'What occurred[1] to me at Wetz-

[1] "Was mir in Wetzlar begegnet"—meaning (as is clear from the context) what met or encountered him on his first arrival.

lar is of no great importance; but it may receive a higher interest if the reader will allow me to give a cursory glance at the history of the Imperial Chamber, in order to present to his mind the unfavourable moment at which I arrived.' This it is to write autobiography when one has outlived almost the memories of youth, and lost sympathy with many of its agitations. At the time he was in Wetzlar he would have looked strangely on any one who ventured to tell him that the history of the Imperial Chamber was worth a smile from Charlotte; but at the time of writing his meagre account of Wetzlar, he had, perhaps, some difficulty in remembering what Charlotte's smiles were like."

The nineteenth book of the Autobiography comprises the most vivid details of that experience which was fused in 'Werther,' with the most life-like and lover-like description of Charlotte, and an account of their mutual feelings, redolent of the memories, the agitations, and the sympathies of youth. Formally announcing the intention to give the desired information touching the persons introduced and the feelings developed in 'Werther,' Goethe begins by stating that, amongst the young men attached to an embassy with a view to a diplomatic career, was one Kestner, whom they were wont to call the bridegroom. His capacity and industry fully justified the hope that he would soon secure an appointment; and on the strength of his expectations, he ventured to enter into an engagement with a young lady who suited him in all respects. After the death of her mother, she had undertaken the charge of a numerous young family; and the manner in which she discharged the duties of a daughter to the widowed father, gave the fairest promise of what she would be to a husband as a wife:—

"Her sterling worth, her amiability, were admitted on all hands. She was one of those who, if they do not inspire vehement passions, are made to exercise a universal attraction. A light, erect, well-formed figure; a pure, sound nature, and the resulting joyous activity of life; an easy management of the necessary affairs of the day,—this was all united in her. . . . Such was the bride. The bridegroom, with his upright and trusting disposition, made every one whom he valued speedily acquainted with her; and the greater part of his day being occupied, he was gratified when his betrothed, after the fulfilment of her household duties, found amusement in walks and pleasure-parties with male and female friends. Lotte—for so we may as well call her once for all—was in a double sense free from coquetry; first, by her nature, which was directed more towards a universal well-wishing than towards particular likings—and then she had plighted herself to a man who, worthy of her, stood ready to unite his fate for life with hers. The serenest atmosphere breathed round her."

So far is he from glossing over or misrepresenting, from intention or forgetfulness, his exact position throughout the whole affair with Charlotte, that I do not know how it can be better told than in his own words:—

"The new-comer, perfectly free from all ties, and careless in the presence of a girl who, already engaged to another, could not interpret the most marked attention as courtship, and could therefore take the more pleasure in it, quietly went his way, but was soon for that reason so drawn in and enchained, and at the same time was so confidentially treated by the young couple, that he no longer knew himself. Indolent and dreamy because nothing present satisfied him, he found what he lacked in a female friend, who, while she lived for the whole year, seemed only to live for the moment. She liked him for her companion: he soon could not bear

her absence, as she connected him with the everyday world; and, what with an extended husbandry, they were inseparable companions in the tilled ground and the meadows, in the vegetable grounds and in the garden. If business permitted, the bridegroom was also of the party; they had all three accustomed themselves to each other without intending it, and did not know how they came to be unable to do without one another. So they lived away the splendid summer—a real German idyl, to which the fertile land contributed the prose, and a pure affection the poetry.

"Wandering through ripe corn-fields, they refreshed themselves in the dewy morning. The song of the lark, the cry of the quail, were pleasant tones. Sultry hours followed; terrible storms came on: they grew more and more attached to each other, and by this continuous love many a little domestic annoyance was easily got over. And thus one ordinary day followed another, and all seemed to be holidays; the whole calendar should have been printed red. He will understand me who recollects what was foretold of the happy unhappy friend of the New Heloise. 'And, sitting at the feet of his beloved, will he break hemp, and wish to break hemp to-day, to-morrow, and the day after—ay, for his whole life!'"

This is pretty well for one who had almost outlived the memories of his youth, and had perhaps some difficulty in remembering what Charlotte's smiles were like. But to continue:—

"Now, when he (Merck) had departed, I separated myself—with a purer conscience, it is true, than from Frederica, but still not without pain. This connection, too, by habit and indulgence, had grown more passionate than was proper on my side; whilst, on the other hand, she and her bridegroom kept themselves with cheerfulness in a calm which could not be more beautiful and amiable, and the resulting security caused me to forget every danger. In the meantime, I could not conceal from myself that this adventure

was coming to an end; for on the immediately expected promotion of the young man depended the union with the amiable maiden: and since man, if he has any resolution, undertakes to will the inevitable, I came to the determination to go away of my own free will, before I was driven away by the unbearable."

In the same book of the Autobiography is a description of Jerusalem (the original of Werther), a young man attached to an embassy, the son of an eminent Protestant divine:—

"His person agreeable, middle height, well made; a face rather round than long; weak, quiet features, and what else may be in keeping with a fair, good-looking young man; blue eyes, besides, rather attracting than speaking. His dress was that introduced into Lower Germany in imitation of the English — blue frock-coat, yellow waistcoat and breeches, and boots with brown tops. People spoke of his decided passion for the wife of a friend. They were never seen together in public."

To this it should be added that Jerusalem had undergone the mortification of being requested to leave an aristocratic circle, for which he was not deemed qualified By birth or position. This, it was supposed, as well as his slow advance in his career, had added to his depression.

Goethe goes on to state that young Germany was then suffering from a morbid restlessness and discontent at the wearing, wasting monotony of life—like (these are *his* illustrations) the Englishman who hung himself because he was tired of dressing and undressing, or the artistic friend (Lessing) who saw with disgust the returning green of spring and wished it red, if only once, for variety's sake. This view of things would not, he thinks, have depressed with so deep a gloom the

spirits of the German youth if an external influence had not been brought to bear upon them :—

"This came to pass through English literature, particularly through the poetical, whose great excellence is accompanied by an earnest melancholy, which it communicates to every one who occupies himself with it. . . . Not only Young's 'Night Thoughts,' where this theme is principally carried out, but most of the other moral-didactic poems, hurry one into this sorrowful domain before one has time to look about one. . . . What still further completes the English poets as misanthropists, and spreads over their writings the disagreeable feeling of repugnance, is, that they one and all, with the multiform divisions of their commonwealth, are obliged to devote, if not the whole, still the best part, of their lives to one party or the other. Now, since any given writer dares not praise and extol those of his own side to whom he is devoted, because he will excite only envy and ill-will, he employs his talent in speaking as much evil as possible of the opponents, and sharpening, nay poisoning, his satirical weapons to the best of his ability. When this is done on both sides, the intervening public is disturbed and clean upturned; so that, to use the mildest expression, nothing but folly and delusion is discoverable in a great intellectually active community."

Even Milton's "Allegro" does not neutralise his "Penseroso," nor Goldsmith's "Traveller" his "Deserted Village."

"Even our father and teacher, Shakespeare, who knows how to diffuse such pure gladness, confirmed this untowardness. Hamlet and his monologues remained ghosts which haunted all young minds. Each of us knew the chief passages by heart, and was fond of reading them; and each believed he might be even as melancholy as the Prince of Denmark, although he had seen no ghosts and had no royal father to revenge."

The absurdity of much of this, especially the alleged effect of party on English literature, is self-evident; and it was not the fault of the English poets in general, or of Shakespeare in particular, that the Germans thought fit to select the most melancholy and depressing of their productions. The marked symptom of this mental malady, distinguishing it from the philosophy (dating from Solomon) which simply teaches the vanity of all things, was the habitual and complacent contemplation of suicide. Goethe discusses it in all its bearings, and passes in review all the most approved methods. Ajax falling on his sword, and the warrior requiring the last office from his shield-bearer, are cited as commendable examples:—

"Women seek in water the cooling of their despair, and the eminently mechanical method of the firearm insures a quick deed with the least effort. One does not like to mention hanging, because it is a dishonourable death. It may do in England, because from youth upwards one there sees so many hung without being dishonoured by the punishment."

Poison and opening the veins are recommended to those who, like Seneca, prefer dying slowly; "and the most refined, quickest, most painless death by an asp, was worthy of a queen who had passed her life in splendour and luxury."

After duly weighing these several methods, and ransacking history for more, Goethe took for his model the Emperor Otho, who, after entertaining his friends at a splendid supper, stabbed himself to the heart with a sharp dagger:—

"Amongst a handsome collection of arms, I possessed a costly, sharp-pointed dagger. This I placed every night by

my bedside; and before putting out my candle, I tried whether I could succeed in sinking the sharp point a couple of inches into my breast. As this, however, never came to pass, *I ended by laughing at myself, cast all hypochondriac crotchets to the winds, and made up my mind to live.* But to do so cheerfully, it was necessary for me to work out a poetical problem where all that I had felt, thought, and fancied on this momentous topic could be expressed."

He was looking out for a story or a plot when he heard of the death of Jerusalem, and at once the entire plan, the full conception, of 'Werther' flashed upon him. He threw his whole soul into the work, and completed it in four weeks. By this composition, he says, more than by any other, he saved himself from a stormy element, into which, partly by his own fault, and partly by the fault of others, he had been thrown:—

"I felt, as after a general confession, once more buoyant and free, and entitled to a new life. The old remedy had this time succeeded to admiration. But whilst I felt lightened and cleared up by having turned reality into poetry, my friends were perplexed by it, believing that people would be driven to turn poetry into reality, play out the romance, and haply shoot themselves in right earnest. What here at the beginning was said amongst the few, occurred afterwards to the great public; and this little book, which had done me so much good, was decried as highly mischievous."

The effect was almost unparalleled: he compares it to the explosion of a large mine by a spark; and remarking that the public cannot be expected to receive an artistic work artistically, modestly attributes its extraordinary success to the subject, the matter, the substance, independently of the execution or form. Mr Carlyle adopts and amplifies this theory:—

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"That nameless Unrest, the blind struggle of a soul in bondage—that high, sad, longing Discontent, which was agitating every bosom—had driven Goethe to despair. All felt it; he alone could give it voice. And here lies the secret of his popularity: *in his deep, susceptive heart he felt a thousand times more keenly what every one was feeling;* with the creative gift which belonged to him as a poet, he bodied it forth into visible shape, gave it a local habitation and a name, and so made himself the spokesman of his generation. 'Werther' is but the cry of that dim, rooted pain under which all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing: it paints the misery, it passionately utters the complaint; and heart and voice, all over Europe, loudly and at once respond to it."

Goethe does not describe this morbid weariness of life as agitating every bosom, but simply as affecting young Germany. It affected young France much in the same manner about 1830, when two young men, Lebras and Lescousse, on the failure of a small piece at the Gaité, put an end to their lives by charcoal and were immortalised by Beranger for so doing. It may also be inferred that suicide was gaining ground in 1813, when Madame de Staël published her Essay against it—"which" (writes Byron) "I presume will make somebody shoot himself—as a sermon by Blinkensop, in *proof* of Christianity, sent a hitherto most orthodox acquaintance of mine out of a chapel-of-ease a perfect atheist." A suicidal tendency is (or used to be) regarded by foreigners as the normal disposition of an Englishman; and a French traveller, describing London, sets down that he could not take a ride round the Serpentine in a November evening without seeing a dead body floating on the surface or dangling from a tree. But we were not aware

that this national complaint was more than ordinarily virulent, or spread all over Europe like an epidemic, in or about 1773. There is no symptom of it in French or English literature or in the correspondence of the period; although, if all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing under it, we should surely not look in vain for traces of it in Boswell, Walpole, Grimm, Diderot, and Voltaire.

The national mind of both countries was under widely different influences; and the disease in question is commonly confined to the idle and the young—originating, in nine cases out of ten, in mortified vanity, the want of regular occupation, or a diseased liver; for which a blue-pill would be a *more* appropriate remedy than a pistol-bullet. Instead of feeling a thousand times more keenly what every one (young Jerusalem inclusive) was feeling, Goethe had shaken it off, and was laughing at it as a hypochondriac crotchet, before he bodied it forth; and his friends, followed by the public, accused him of bringing to fever-heat the malady which is supposed to have been at its worst when he wrote. The success of 'Werther' was about as much owing to a prevalent tendency to commit suicide as the success of Schiller's 'Robbers' (which was said to have brought robbers into fashion) was owing to a prevalent tendency to take to the forest or the road.

It would be doing less than justice to Goethe to accept his own explanation of his success, which was rather accelerated than caused by the embodiment of this particular feeling—hardly the paramount feeling or principal feature of the production, after all. The grand attraction, the abiding charm, of 'Werther,' is the felicity of

the conception, the artistic manner in which the trains are laid for the effects, the harmony of proportion between the parts, the delicacy of sentiment and touch, the grace of expression, and the exquisite finish of the whole. Scott wrote advisedly when he mentioned the "elegant" author of 'Werther.' But it must be read in the German: no translation can convey an adequate notion of its beauties; they are too bloomlike. There is but one step from the pathetic and tender to the ridiculous (as well as from the sublime), and this step has been taken over and over again in the English and French translations, by which the book is popularly known.

In their last interview, Charlotte, not to be alone with Werther, sends for some female friends. On receiving their excuses, "She was about to tell the maid to remain with her work in the adjoining room; then altered her mind." In what professes to be an improved translation, this simple sentence is inflated thus:—

"These unlucky events [the non-arrival of the friends] at first gave Charlotte considerable uneasiness, but the consciousness of her innocence at length inspired her with a noble and generous confidence, soaring above the narrow chimeras of Albert's brain; and, sensible of the angelic chastity of her angelic heart, she rejected her first intention of causing her maid to remain in the room."[1]

Another plain sentence, "the lips and eyes of Werther glowed on Lotte's arm," is rendered:—

[1] The Sorrows of Werter. Translated by W. Render, D.D. 1801. He states in an advertisement that this translation was undertaken chiefly from the consideration that the version which had been "so universally read" in England had been made from a mutilated French translation. Even the title is mistranslated. It should be 'The Sufferings of Young Werther.'

"The ardent eyes and lips of Werter were directed to her alabaster arm, so finely turned that statuaries vied to catch the grace it gave."

These specimens may suffice, and it will be remembered that the finest and most delicate touches depend on the simplicity of the language.

I cannot help thinking that speculations or monologues about suicide have had far less to do with the popularity of the book than the scenes, instinct with emotion, into which the tender passion is largely infused; the more particularly because the young of both sexes (if not the old) can sympathise with it—and it nowhere appears that the most sensitive half of the human race have been prone to sentimental suicide at any time. "I began," said M. de Lesseps, "with our patriot and impetuous youth. With youth and woman on our side, success is certain." Goethe was sure of both when he rang the changes on the universal passion:—

"Qui que tu sois, voilà ton maitre,
Qui l'est, le fut, ou le doit être."[1]

In his eagerness to discredit the Autobiography, Mr Lewes contends that the state of Goethe's feelings towards Charlotte was not such as he describes; because, in a letter to Kestner, he affects indifference, and talks of the possibility of his becoming fonder of another girl than of Lotte. But it should be remembered that he was writing to Lotte's betrothed; and in a letter on their approaching marriage, he states, as a thing well known to Kestner, that he was attached to Lotte, and attached to her from his heart. The minor

[1] Voltaire—on a statuette of Love.

poems confirm the Autobiography.[1] At the same time, there is no reason for supposing that his passion for Charlotte troubled his peace more than the many other passions which were to endure for ever and died out or were replaced within the year. It was a thing to dream of, to write about, to poetise or dramatise: when it had served his purpose in this way, it shared the fate of the rest. He tells us that, when he had finished 'Werther,' he felt, "as after a general confession, entitled to a new life"—including, of course, a new love. He makes no exception: he had got rid of all that annoyed or agitated him; he had found the remedy which Lady Macbeth's doctor could not find to

> "Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart."

But was the stuff that admitted of such a remedy really perilous? did it weigh upon the heart? Did 'Werther,' as Mr Carlyle assumes, really come straight from the "deep, susceptive heart" of the author? Or was it not rather the work of the imagination—fusing into a harmonious whole the multiform materials supplied by the fortuitous concurrence of feelings and events, and heated just enough to warm the artist to his work without disturbing him?

Nicolai, of Berlin, wrote a parody in which Werther's pistol turns out to have been only loaded with chicken-blood, which causes the loss of both his eyes. Goethe, instead of being angry, capped the joke by a continuation (in the form of a dialogue), in which Werther,

[1] *E.g.*, the verses *An Lottchen*—

> "Und das Herz—es schliesst sich zu.
> So fand ich dich, und ging dir frei entgegen."

married to Charlotte, is made to say that the possession of her charms is an inadequate compensation for the pleasure he could no longer enjoy of contemplating them.

Goethe says that, bearing in mind the famous Venus, "the mingled beauties of exulting Greece," he took the liberty of moulding his Lotte after the figures and qualities of many pretty women, although the main features were taken from the best beloved. "The inquiring public could therefore discover likenesses to many young ladies; and it was not altogether a matter of indifference to his fair friends to pass for the right one." These numerous Lottes, however, caused him endless annoyance, for every one he met wished to know precisely the whereabouts of the genuine one. A much greater source of annoyance must have been the reception of his book by Kestner and his wife, who were naturally much hurt. They forgave him; and Kestner writes to Hennings: "You have no idea what a man he is. But when his fire has somewhat burnt out, then we shall have the greatest joy in him." The one important suppression in the Autobiography is this correspondence with Kestner, which was a delicate as well as sore subject.

In the middle of a conversation about Napoleon, Goethe suddenly exclaimed:—

"'What book had Napoleon in his field-library? My "Werther."'

"'That he had thoroughly studied it,' said I [Eckermann], 'was seen at his Erfurt *levee*.'

"'He had studied it,' said Goethe, 'as a criminal judge studies his processes, and in this sense spoke of it to me.'"

Napoleon took an objection touching which Goethe maintained a mysterious secrecy; but according to the Chancellor von Müller, it was that Werther, in the earlier editions, is made to kill himself from a mixed motive—from disappointed ambition as well as unhappy love, which Napoleon maintained to be contrary to nature. The same objection, taken by Herder in 1782 on the ground that the mixed motive is contrary to art, was admitted and acted upon in the revised edition, in which Werther dies exclusively for love. But as, in point of fact, young Jerusalem died as originally represented, Napoleon and Herder may be compared to the Athenian critics who hissed the real pig and loudly applauded the imitative squeak.

Lessing, a warm admirer of 'Werther,' suggested that, in order to counteract any mischievous tendency, Goethe should add an epilogue, "and the more cynical the better." The time came when he was disposed to act upon this hint. He was never a Wertherite any more than Wilkes was a Wilkite; and he began seriously to think of applying an antidote to the poison he was accused of diffusing, when a young lady, the victim of unrequited love, was found drowned in the Ilm, with a copy of 'Werther' in her pocket. In 1778 appeared 'Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit' ('The Triumph of Sensibility'), which, we are told, was intended to put down Wertherism. If so, the means were ill adapted to the end. The ridicule is directed against a description of sensibility or sentimentalism which could never have become dangerous or widespread, and the temporary success of the play is said to have been owing to the satirical allusions suppressed in the printed copy. We

must take the Aristophanic humour upon trust; but sportive raillery was not Goethe's strong point, nor did he shine in a *jeu d'esprit*—witness his 'Gods, Heroes, and Wieland,' where Mercury strives in vain to be lively, and Hercules is as heavy as his club.

Amongst the many imitations of 'Werther,' the only one that has attained a permanent position in literature is the 'Jacopo Ortis' of Ugo Foscolo.

Goethe was now a celebrity whose acquaintance was eagerly courted. "It was by no means displeasing to the young author to be gazed at as a literary meteor; so he sought with modest self-complacency to pay homage to the most approved men of his country. Amongst others, the excellent Justus Möser is to be named before all others." What attracted him in Möser's writings was their thorough mastery of citizen life. A correspondence with Lavater led to a close intimacy. At the time it commenced, Lavater was calling on all the world to send him drawings and outlines, and especially representations of Christ; and, on Goethe's professing inability, insisted on his sending a sketch of the Saviour, such as he supposed Him to be. The physiognomist's conception of his own humanity so completely agreed with his conception of Christ, that it was impossible for him to understand how a man could live and breathe without being a Christian. Here the new friends were on the point of splitting; and at last Lavater broke out—"Either Christian or atheist." "I then," says Goethe, "declared, that if he would not leave me my Christianity as I had hitherto cherished it, I could just as well decide for atheism, especially as I saw that no one rightly knew what either exactly meant."

In marked contrast to Lavater was Basedow, the edu-

cational enthusiast, who maintained that the improved education of youth was the one thing needful for the regeneration of mankind. He was as much prone to what was commonly deemed irreligion, bordering on blasphemy, as Lavater to religion; and he was a man of dirty disagreeable habits to boot, being always enveloped in a cloud of bad tobacco smoke. Goethe detested smoking and was finically neat; yet such was his eagerness to know everything and everybody worth knowing, that he made long excursions with Basedow, and sat up night after night with him in a close confined room with a tainted atmosphere.

Klopstock, Zimmerman, Jacobi, and the Stolbergs are enumerated among the men of mark whose acquaintance he formed or renewed about the same time. Among the subjects which he meditated for dramatic treatment were Mahomet, The Wandering Jew, and Prometheus. His conception of each, which he has fully developed, and the fragment he has left of 'Prometheus,' are fully worthy of his creative genius at his best. He also projected a 'Julius Cæsar' play that was to stand in ambitious rivalry with Shakespeare's. One of the finest things in the 'Prometheus' is the defiant apostrophe to Jove:—

"I honour thee! Wherefore? Hast thou ever mitigated the pangs of the burthened? Hast thou ever stopped the tears of the troubled? Have not almighty Time and eternal Fate, thy lords and mine, welded me into man?"

There is a song of Mahomet in which the career of the prophet is finely shadowed out by the image of a mountain brook swelling to a mighty river. In 1800 Goethe translated Voltaire's 'Mahomet' and 'Tancred' for the Weimar theatre.

CHAPTER XIV.

'CLAVIGO'—'STELLA.

GOETHE'S next completed production, after 'Werther,' grew out of an act of gallantry. The wag of his Frankfort society proposed that the young people should be coupled by lot, and that the pairs thus constituted should represent married people. It chanced that the same young lady was twice coupled with Goethe. They got on so well together, that the thought occurred to both to make the tie permanent; and the match being in every way suitable, the parents consented and a regular engagement existed for a time. How or when it was broken off, or permitted to drop, is not explained. One evening, during its existence, Goethe read aloud to the society the 'Memoir' of Beaumarchais against Clavigo; and his *fiancée* imposed it on him as a task to dramatise the story, which he undertook to do within a week. As he was escorting home his titular wife, she asked him why he was silent. He answered that he was thinking about the play, and had already got to the middle of it. She pressed his hand in grateful acknowledgment, and he snatched a kiss, for which she rebuked him, saying, "You must not forget your character: people do not

think it meet for married folks to be loving." "Let them think," he replied; "we will have it our own way."

The play, a five-act tragedy, was, he says, completed within the week; and so it might have been, although (as Herr Goedecke suggests) there may have been some mistake as to the dates. The plot is soon told. Clavigo, arriving in Madrid to seek his fortune, is domesticated in the family of Guilbert, Beaumarchais' brother-in-law, an architect. He is treated with great kindness, and eventually betrothed to Marie, the unmarried sister. He rises rapidly, acquires high reputation as a journalist, gets a good place, and makes himself so useful to the Government that the brightest prospects are before him, which would be advanced by a brilliant marriage and clouded by a mean one. Encouraged by his friend Carlos, the *âme damnée* of the piece, he throws over Marie; who is dying of a broken heart, when Beaumarchais arrives upon the scene, breathing vengeance. He seeks an interview with Clavigo, who is offered the alternative of a duel *à outrance* or a written and signed acknowledgment of having broken an honourable engagement without pretext and without excuse. Weak, impulsive, and really repentant for the moment, he entreats to be allowed to renew his engagement, to which Beaumarchais, from indulgence to his sister's feelings, consents, and tears up the declaration before his face.

After vowing eternal fidelity, Clavigo goes away, to have the imprudence of his conduct fully laid before him by his friend, who persuades him to throw over Marie a second time and offer to encounter Beaumarchais at the sword's point. His friend, who has advised the duel without any intention of letting it take place, procures a

warrant to apprehend Beaumarchais and send him out of the country, on a charge of having extorted the declaration by violence from an unarmed man whom he had taken unawares. The family receive warning of this treachery from the French ambassador: Marie faints, and is carried out senseless. Sophie, the sister, reappears to say that she is dead.

So far the plot agrees tolerably well with the facts. The fifth act is fiction. Clavigo, who has promised to leave his own house for a retirement provided by the friend, is conducted by the guide through a street, which at first he does not recognise, till he sees mutes with torches stationed at a well-known door. He sends his servant to inquire whom they are about to bury, and is told Marie Beaumarchais. He stops and soliloquises in the befitting strain till the funeral procession is formed and moves on, when he advances and peremptorily commands it to halt. To the indignant remonstrances of the brother-in-law and Buenco, a friend, he replies :—

"Have done! Do not make me mad! The miserable are dangerous. I must see her. (*He tears off the pall. Marie is lying, clothed in white, with folded hands, in the coffin. Clavigo steps back, and hides his face.*)

Buenco. Wouldst thou bring her to life to kill her over again?

Clavigo. Poor scorner! Marie! (*He falls down before the coffin.*)

Enter Beaumarchais. Buenco has left me. She is not dead, say they? I must see, in defiance of the devil! I must see her! Torches! a dead body! (*He rushes forward, sees the coffin, and falls speechless. They lift him up—he is now fainting—Guilbert holds him.*)

Clavigo (on the other side of the coffin). Marie! Marie!

Beaumarchais (springing up). That is his voice! Who

calls Marie? How with the ring of the voice a glowing rage rushed through my veins!

Clavigo. It is I!

Beaumarchais (*looking wildly, and grasping his sword. Guilbert holds him*).

Clavigo. I fear not thy fiery eyes, nor the point of thy sword. See here this closed eye, these folded hands.

Beaumarchais. Dost *thou* show me *that?* (*He breaks loose —presses on Clavigo, who draws: they fight—Beaumarchais plunges his sword into his breast.*)

Clavigo (*falling*). I thank thee, brother! You wed us! (*He sinks on the coffin.*)

Beaumarchais (*tearing him away*). Off from this saint, accursed one!

Clavigo. Woe is me! (*The bearers hold him.*)

Beaumarchais. Blood! Look up, Marie! look at thy wedding garment, and then close thy eyes for ever! See how I have consecrated thy resting-place with the blood of thy murderer! Excellent! Superb!"

Beaumarchais relents as Clavigo's death approaches. They all give him their hands in token of forgiveness, and he dies, laying his last injunction on Carlos to save the brother.

Goethe himself was well satisfied with this play. Its reception was of a mixed character: it excited a sensation: many tears were shed over it. Jacobi thought it a masterpiece, but the majority of the critics shook their heads. Voss remarked that it was well Goethe had declared himself the writer, as no one would otherwise have recognised the author of 'Götz von Berlichingen.' Wieland (admitting many merits) thought it not difficult to show from 'Clavigo' that Goethe was far from being the prodigy he had been thought. It is strange, however, that none of these critics appear to have been

struck by the similarity of the catastrophe to the scene in 'Hamlet' where Hamlet and Laertes encounter in Ophelia's grave.

"At the time" (says Goethe) "when I was pained by my grief at Frederica's situation, I again, after my old fashion, sought relief from poetry. I again continued the poetical confession which I had commenced, so that by this self-tormenting penance I might be worthy of an internal absolution. The two Marias in 'Götz von Berlichingen' and 'Clavigo,' and the two bad characters who play the parts of their lovers, may have been the result of such penitent reflection."

So also might 'Stella,' which, in a bad translation, suggested "The Rovers, or The Double Arrangement" of 'The Antijacobin.' The opening scene is at a post-house, where Madame Sommer (Cecilia) and her daughter Lucie have just arrived by post, with the intention of placing Lucie as companion with the lady of the neighbouring chateau (Stella), whom neither of them has seen. They learn her history from the postmistress, who tells them that, about eight years since, she came to reside at the chateau with the baron as his reputed wife, although it was suspected that they were united by no legal tie: that three years since the baron disappeared, leaving Stella plunged in the deepest woe; and that since the death of her child, her only interest was in doing good. She is impatient to see Lucie, who makes a most favourable impression, and is entreated to bring over her mother without delay. The two ladies meet, and interchange ideas on the subject of love and abandonment, as to which there is a wonderful unanimity in their sentiments and their experience; for Cecilia's husband

to whom she was devoted, had likewise left her without warning some eight years ago :—

"*Madame Sommer.* We believe men. In the moments of passion they deceive themselves: why should not we be deceived?

Stella. Madame, a thought strikes me. We will be to one another what they ought to have been to us! We will remain together! Your hand! From this moment I leave you not!"[1]

Whilst the ladies are thus conversing, Fernando (the husband of one and lover of the other) has arrived at the inn; and we collect from a soliloquy that his real affections are engaged to Stella, whom he left under a fit of remorse to look after his wife. Not finding her, in consequence of her change of residence, he has returned to rejoin Stella. He dines at the *table-d'hôte* with Lucie, not knowing her to be his daughter. Lucie then returns to the chateau, and is present when Stella produces the portrait of her lost love, which Madame Sommer recognises as the portrait of her lost husband.

"*Lucie.* What is the matter, mother? How pale you look!

Madame Sommer. This is the last day of my life. My heart will never bear it! All, all at once!

Lucie. Great God!

Madame Sommer. The—the portrait—the expected—the beloved one! It is my husband! It is thy father!

Lucie. Mother, dearest mother!

Madame Sommer. And he is here!—will fall into her arms in a few minutes! And we?—Lucie, we must be gone."

As they are hurrying out, Fernando passes without

[1] "A thought strikes me—let us swear eternal friendship."—The Rovers.

noticing them, but is at once recognised by his wife. An interview of surpassing tenderness between Stella and him is interrupted by a servant, who comes to announce that the two strange ladies, Madame Sommer and Lucie, are on the point of starting; and Stella commissions Fernando to see Madame Sommer, and detain them, if possible. In the ensuing interview, Cecilia at first plays the *incognita*, and the complete recognition is only brought about by degrees. Nothing can be more touching or truer to the life than the picture she draws of the manner in which a romantic passion dies away when it has lost the charm of novelty and is made to undergo the test of domesticity. She has been describing the manner in which her life had been blighted by a man:—

"*Fernando.* The guilty one!

Madame Sommer (*with suppressed sadness*). He is not guilty! I pity the man who ties himself to a girl.

Fernando. Madame!

Madame Sommer (*sportively, to hide her emotion*). No, assuredly; I look upon him as a prisoner. He is drawn over out of his world into ours, with which at bottom he has nothing in common. He deludes himself for a time; and woe to us when his eyes are opened! And now I could at last be nothing to him but an honest housewife, who, it is true, clung to him with the best endeavour to be pleasing to him, to be careful for him—who devoted all her days to the well-being of their house, of their child, and indeed was obliged to be busied with so many little things that my heart and head often became waste—that I was no entertaining companion—that he, with the vivacity of his spirit, must often have found my company flat. He is not in fault.

Fernando (*at her feet*). I am!

Madame Sommer (*weeping on his neck*). Mine own!

Fernando. Cecilia! My wife!"

The daughter joins them, and they arrange to depart immediately. He is to tell Stella that he is only going a short way to see them off. He seeks an interview for that purpose, and is captivated anew as she describes how he first won her heart:—

"I know not if you observed that you had enchained my interest from the first moment of our first meeting. I, at least, soon became conscious that your eyes sought mine. Ah, Fernando! then my uncle brought the music, you took your violin, and, as you played, my eyes rested upon you free from care. I studied every feature of your face; and during an unexpected pause, you fixed your eyes upon me—upon *me!* They met mine! How I blushed, how I looked away! You observed it, Fernando; for from that moment I felt that you looked oftener over your music-book, often played out of tune, to the disturbance of my uncle. Every false note, Fernando, went to my heart. It was the sweetest confusion I ever felt in my life."

Strange, that this passage escaped the wits of the 'Antijacobin.' A servant arrives to say that the chaise is ready, and that the ladies are waiting for him. His excuses make matters worse; the inevitable *dénouement* occurs; and the situation becomes exceedingly critical, when a solution is proposed by Madame Sommer in the most heroic spirit of self-sacrifice:—

"*Fernando.* Leave me to my fate! and God have pity on you! (*He throws himself into an arm-chair.*)

Cecilia (*goes to him and takes his hand*). There was once a Count——

Fernando (*is about to rise; she detains him*).

Cecilia. A German Count. A feeling of pious duty drove him from his wife, from his lands, towards the Holy Land.

Fernando. Ha!

Cecilia. He was a man of integrity; he loved his wife,

took leave of her, recommended his household to her, embraced her, and set forth. He passed through many countries, waged war, and was taken prisoner. His master's daughter took pity on his captivity; she loosened his chains; they fled. She accompanied him anew through all the dangers of the war. The dear warrior! Crowned with victory, he was now to return to his noble wife. And his damsel? He felt humankind, he believed in humankind, and took her with him. See there, the brave lady of the house, who hurries to meet her husband, sees all her truth, all her trust, all her hopes rewarded by having him once again in her arms! And then his knights bounding from their steeds upon their fatherland; his servants unloading the booty, and laying it at her feet, and she already mentally disposing of it in adorning the castle or in gifts to friends. Dear, excellent woman, the greatest treasure has been kept back! Who is she who, veiled, approaches with the rest of the suite? Gently she dismounts. 'Here,' cried the Count, taking her by the hand and leading her to his wife,—'here! see all that—and *her!* Take it from her hands—take me also from them. She has loosened the chains from my neck, she has commanded the winds—she has won me, has served me, has nursed me. How much I am indebted! There thou hast her. Reward her.'

Fernando (*reclines sobbing, with his arms spread on the table*).

Cecilia. On her neck cried the true wife; with floods of tears she cried: 'Take all that I can give thee. Take half of that which entirely belongs to you. Take him all. Leave him all to me. Each shall have him without stealing anything from the other.' And on his neck, at his feet, she cried: 'We are thine.' She clasped his hands, hung on him, and God in heaven rejoiced at their love, and His holy vicegerent spoke His blessing on it. And their happiness and their love hallowed one dwelling, one bed, and one grave.

Fernando. God in heaven! What a beam of hope breaks in!

Cecilia. She is there. She is ours (*going towards the door of the cabinet*). Stella!"

Stella consents, and the curtain falls, as, with an arm round each, he exclaims, "Mine! mine!"

The story of the Count was traditionally told of a Count de Gleichen; and it would seem that at times there was something congenial to the German mind in arrangements which modified the restraints of law and custom. In 'Die Freunde machen den Philosophen' ('Friends make the Philosopher'), there is a double marriage, by which the lady is provided with two husbands.

The poet Bürger was one day crossed by the vision of a lovely woman, which haunted him. He met her (as he thought) soon afterwards, proposed, was accepted, and had just affixed his signature to the marriage-contract after going through the religious ceremony, when behind his bride he saw her sister, who was the real object of his day-dream. He frankly told his bride how the mistake had arisen. She at once resolved on the abdication of her newly-acquired rights; and the final arrangement was, that all three should keep house together, the married sister retaining that title in the eye of the world, but being to all other intents and purposes the sister-in-law.

'Stella' had an extraordinary run at the Berlin Theatre, where it was brought out in 1776. It was originally entitled 'A Play for Lovers;' and its popularity was mainly owing to the scenes of passion, which are powerfully written without trenching on delicacy, so far as externals are concerned. Goethe writes to Jacobi: "How I love her (Stella), and love her for thy sake!" which implies that Jacobi had been consulted, and had

approved. But the obvious objection to the plot did not pass unnoticed; and there was current an epigram, which may be paraphrased thus:—

> "His glowing page, with passion fraught,
> From dull morality is free:
> Self-murder he 'd already taught,
> And now he's got to bigamy."

The purpose to which the play was turned in England, of ridiculing German literature and taste, may have become known to him; and alluding to its production in the Weimar Theatre in 1806, he writes that, "according to our manners, which are essentially based on monogamy, the connection of a man with two women, especially as here represented, is not to be managed, and is therefore completely adapted for tragedy." A tragical ending was consequently annexed. In the piece as printed, Cecilia's proposal comes too late: Stella has taken poison; and, finding her dying, Fernando catches up a pistol, hurries from the room, and shoots himself.

CHAPTER XV.

LILI.

GOETHE'S fugitive attachments follow each other with startling rapidity—

> "Like the light of the summer, when one dies away
> Another as sweet and as smiling comes on."

They recall the Frenchman's excuse for inconstancy—*Je change d'objet, mais la passion reste.* But passion would be a misapplied term. There was no heart in the matter. What he wanted was a *beau-ideal* to excite his fancy and stimulate his creative faculty. The extreme youth of his favourites showed how little he thought about suitable companionship. Lili, his next, was only sixteen, though a widow. She was the daughter of a rich banker at Frankfort, with whom she resided; and it illustrates Goethe's habits and social position at this time (1775) to find that he felt like a fish out of water in the circles to which he was induced to follow her. She frankly told him, as the tie was forming, that she had been wont to amuse herself with making captives without caring for them, and meant to play the same game with him, but was caught in her own toils, and made captive in her turn. It may be

suspected that this very avowal was one of her pretty tricks; but, such are the illusions of self-love, Goethe was fascinated by it as completely as a novice might have been:—

"These confessions flowed forth from so pure, childlike a nature, that she thereby made me most forcibly her own. A reciprocal want, a habit of seeing each other, now grew up; but how many a day, how many an evening deep into the night, should I not have had to renounce if I had not been able to resolve to see her in her own circles! This caused me manifold annoyance."

He told Eckermann in 1830 that she was the first whom he had deeply and truly loved—that all the inclinations which moved him in the following years of his life were only light and superficial in comparison:—

"My liking for her had something so delicate and something so peculiar that even now it has influenced my style in the exposition of that painfully happy epoch. When you come to read the fourth volume of my Autobiography, you will find that this love is something quite different from a love in romances."

"The same," replied Eckermann, "might be said also of your love for Gretchen and for Frederica. The delineation of both is likewise so new and original that the novelists invent nothing similar. Indeed one love," he added, "is never like another;" to which Goethe assented. In the fourth volume of the Autobiography he says:—

"My relation to her was from person to person—to a beautiful, amiable, and accomplished daughter. It resembled my earlier attachments, but was of a still higher kind. On external circumstances, however, or the mingling of a social

state, I had never thought. An unconquerable longing had gained the mastery: I could not exist without her, nor she without me; but in the company and under the influence of particular members of her circle, what days and hours of disappointment occurred!"

In reference to the tender verses he addressed to her, he writes:—

"If any one has carefully read over these songs attentively, or (better still) sung them with feeling, a breath of the fulness of these happy hours will most assuredly hover round."

The tone in which we speak of past feelings will of course vary with our mood and the person we are addressing. What a man, who is eternally making love right and left, writes to one woman about another, must be taken with many grains of allowance; and there is nothing in Goethe's letters to Augusta von Stolberg to bear out the reiterated charge that his correspondence is substantially at variance with the Autobiography.

He and Lili did not, Goethe says, expressly say it to each other; but the feeling of a reciprocal unqualified delight, the full conviction that a separation was impossible, with their firm confidence in each other, compelled them to think seriously of marriage, which neither his nor her family contemplated with complacency. *Hers* regarded it as a *mésalliance;* and *his* dreaded a connection with a fine lady and spoilt beauty. The task of reconciling them to the step was voluntarily undertaken by a Mademoiselle Delf, a friend of both, who must have possessed qualities advantageously distinguishing her from the common run of busybodies:—

"How she began it, how she set aside the difficulties which must have stood in her way—enough, she came to

us one evening and brought the consent. 'Give me your hands,' she cried, with her pathetically imperative manner. I stood opposite to Lili and held out my hand; she placed hers, truly not hesitating but slowly, in mine. After fetching a deep breath, we fell with vivid emotion into each other's arms."

The following reflection on this event betrays the artist rather than the lover; and he does not state that it occurred to him at the time:—

"It was a strange decree of the ruling powers above us, that I, in the course of my singular career, should also experience how a bridegroom feels. I will venture to say that, for a well-regulated man, it is the pleasantest of all recollections."

The charm of the sensation vanished with its novelty. When he came to consider the arrangements for their future establishment, he began to think that the position of a bridegroom about to become a husband might have its disadvantages. He had no independent fortune: his pecuniary prospects from literature may be inferred from the fact that, in the height of his fame as author of 'Götz von Berlichingen' and 'Werther,' a bookseller offered him three pounds for 'Stella.' The want of a well-defined and well-protected copyright long left German authors a prey to piracy. The notion of introducing his elegant bride under his father's roof revolted him. She would feel in his paternal circle as much out of her element as he felt in hers; and it was not so easy for her to adapt her habits to a new way of life as it had been for him to lay aside his plain coat for a laced one. Nor had the families, although they had formally assented, made the smallest

approach to intimacy. Marriage, again, was changing the ideal for the real—always an uncongenial process for a poet. His interest began to flag; and vowing eternal fidelity all the while, he seized the occasion of the Stolbergs passing through Frankfort to join them in an expedition to Switzerland.

He says that the project was particularly welcome to him at a moment when the great point was to make an experiment whether he could renounce Lili. Here we have Goethe all over and to the life. The bare fact of his contemplating such an experiment proved that no experiment was necessary—that the problem was already solved. His love, his notion of the binding force of a betrothal, were clearly not such as are commonly found in novels—nor, it is to be hoped, in actual life. But they were the utmost he was capable of feeling: in no case before or after is the faculty of self-examination impeded by warmth; and although his inclination for Lili fluctuated with circumstances and was controlled by reason, it by no means follows that it was not (as he told Eckermann) marked by features of delicacy and refinement peculiar to it. She was the first woman of the higher class, of (what he terms) "that greater and brilliant society," to whom he had stood in the relation of an accepted lover; and his reflections, on seeing her fashionably dressed in the midst of rival adorers, show that the position enhanced her charms. "That bosom hidden under lace and jewellery, was it not the same that had opened its inmost core to me, and into which I looked as clearly as into my own?"

In the same breath, in the same paragraph which mentions the proposed experiment, he says: "With some

intimation, but without taking leave, I separated myself from Lili; she had so grown into my heart, that I actually did not believe I was going away from her."

He mentions, as a remarkable fact, that amongst the numbers of young people who flocked round him in the first flush of his celebrity, there was not a single noble; although many men past thirty of noble birth cultivated his acquaintance with earnest purposes and enlightened views. But the Counts Stolberg and their companion Count Hangwitz were considerably under thirty when he joined their party, and so young and frolicsome that Merck told him, "It is a foolish thing of you to go with these lads. You will not stay long with them. Thy endeavour, thy unswerving tendency, is to give a poetical form to the actual; the others seek to realise the so-called poetical — the imaginative, — and that yields nothing but stupid trash."

He parted company from the Stolbergs at Carlsruhe to visit his sister, now married to the Upper Bailiff of Emmendingen. She strongly urged him to give up Lili for both their sakes, dwelling particularly on the social incompatibilities which weighed so heavily on his mind:—

"I could promise her nothing, although I was obliged to confess she had convinced me. I went on with the enigmatical feeling in my heart on which passion keeps itself alive; for Love, the child, holds on obstinately to the garment of Hope, even when she is already taking the run to bound away."

He returned to Frankfort towards the beginning of August 1775. Lili's friends and his had been equally active in trying to break off the engagement, which, indeed, was considered virtually broken by his voluntary

absence without taking leave; but they could not help meeting, and it is clear that he found pleasure, although he called it pain, in the emotional if embarrassing relation to each other in which they were placed. Friends told him in confidence that Lili, when all the obstacles to a union were laid before her, had declared herself ready to give up everything for his sake, and go with him to America, then, more than now, the El Dorado of those who felt cramped in Europe. But this depressed instead of elevating him. "My handsome paternal house, only a hundred paces from hers, was still a more tolerable, more profitable, situation than the distant, uncertain neighbourhood beyond the seas: but I do not deny that in her vicinity all hopes, all wishes, came forth again; and I was agitated by new uncertainties."

Self-sacrifice, the world well lost for Cleopatra's or anybody's eyes, was not in his way. In amatory matters he preferred the breeze that ruffles the surface to the storm that upheaves the ocean from its depths.

Just the sort of agitation that suited him was excited by the Frankfort fair, which supplied abundant proofs that what Lili had told him of her coquetry was true. The mercantile friends of her father's house arrived in rapid succession; and not a man of them, young or old, would or could completely give up a certain interest in the charming daughter. "The elderly, with their *uncle* manners, were wholly insupportable; they did not keep their hands to themselves, and in the midst of their repulsive twaddle would demand a kiss, to which the cheek was not denied. It was so natural gracefully to content them all." Then the conversation, with its allusions to former adventures and former wooers!

"But" (he continues) "let me turn from this, even in memory, almost unendurable torture to the poetry by which some spiritual heartfelt mitigation was brought to bear on the situation. 'Lili's Park' may belong to this epoch or thereabouts."

The conception of this little poem is singularly happy. Lili is represented, basket in hand, feeding her four-footed and feathered favourites, amongst whom the author figures as a bear, manifesting his presence by an occasional whine or suppressed growl. When she has distributed the contents of her basket, he draws near, crouching. She places her pretty foot upon his neck with a caressing action: he leans his head against her knee; and on days of favour she rubs his lips with a drop or two of an intoxicating balsam, sweeter than any honey. This entrances him; but on the instant she is gone. More than once she leaves the door of his den half open, and waits, mockingly, to see if he will escape. He vows to fly, adjures the gods to aid him, stretches his limbs for the decisive effort, and hugs his chain.

Many other minor poems arose out of their intercourse; and the extent to which she occupied his time and thoughts certainly gives plausibility to his estimate of the comparative degree of interest inspired by her.

Having, he says, in earlier times, when he still hoped to be united to Lili, thrown all his energy on the study and practice of civil business, it struck him that he could now fill up the fearful void which separated him from her by the intellectual and soul-fraught. He therefore began the composition of 'Egmont,' and made considerable progress; but the vicinity of Lili was too agitating:—

"So long as I was absent, I believed in the parting, not in the final separation. All recollections, hopes, and wishes had free play. Now I had come back; and as the meeting of free and happy lovers is a heaven, just so the meeting of two persons, only separated by prudential considerations, is an insupportable purgatory, an entrance-court of hell. . . . I therefore resolved on flight; and there was nothing I desired more than that the young ducal pair of Weimar should come from Carlsruhe to Frankfort, and that I, in conformity with earlier and later invitations, should follow them to Weimar."

They arrived soon afterwards; and it was speedily arranged that he should follow them to Weimar, although with no understanding that he was to become a permanent member of their court. His departure was delayed by an accident; and, rambling round the city one evening to take a last look at the houses of his friends, he could not resist the temptation of stopping before Lili's window. Her apartment was on the ground-floor; and though the blinds were down, he could make out that the lights stood in their usual places, and that she was singing at the piano:—

"It was the song, '*Ach, wie zichst du mich unwiderstehlich!*' ('Ah, how unresistingly dost thou attract me!') which I had addressed to her not quite a year before. I could not help thinking that she sang it more expressively than ever. I could hear every word. After she had finished singing, I saw by the shadow upon the blinds that she was standing up: she walked up and down, but I sought in vain to catch the outline of her lovely form through the thick blind."

Mademoiselle Delf, the matchmaker, although approving his resolution to give up Lili, makes a last effort to detain him; and he breaks from her, exclaiming, in the words of Egmont:—

"Child, child! no more! As lashed by invisible spirits, the sun-born horses of Time bear along the light car of our destiny, and nothing remains for us but, with collected courage, to hold fast the reins and to guide the wheels, now right, now left, from a stone here, from a precipice there—who knows where it is going? He scarcely recollects where he came from."

CHAPTER XVI.

WEIMAR.

WEIMAR at this time, 1775, was little known. Such reputation and attraction as it could boast were principally owing to the Duchess Anna Amalia, the mother of Goethe's patron and friend, Duke Karl August. She was early left a widow, and governed as regent till the accession of her son (born 3d September 1757) on attaining his eighteenth year. She is described by contemporaries as combining a masculine strength of understanding with feminine gentleness and amiability. She had a decided turn for literature and the fine arts, drew, composed, and excelled in private theatricals. She engaged Wieland, and two or three others of intellectual note, to undertake the education of her sons; and thus was formed the nucleus of the circle which afterwards became so celebrated. Karl August, despite his training, had no particular fancy for intellectual pursuits. He made fun of the literary and scientific society as "creating so rarefied an atmosphere that it was no easy matter to breathe in it." He liked to throw off the prince, and was fond of rough practical jokes. It was by falling in with his humour that Goethe first won his

heart; and it was the genial companion rather than the poet that the Duke was anxious to retain about him. His wife, Louise, the reigning Duchess, was generally beloved. Goethe calls her an angel. But she had no taste for the pursuits which were to make Weimar famous; and Prince Constantine, the younger brother of the Duke, agreed in this matter with his sister-in-law.

Arriving at Weimar (November 9, 1775) in his twenty-sixth year, Goethe was received with the most flattering attentions by all the principal personages. The Duke could not move without him. The Duchesses vied with each other in making him talk. The brilliancy of his conversation, set off by his personal advantages and unaffected cordiality of manner, took everybody by storm. Wieland, who had an old grudge against him and might have been excused a shade of jealousy, was the first to be emphatic in his praise. After meeting Goethe two or three times, he writes to Fritz Jacobi:—

"Since the morning, my soul is as full of Goethe as a dewdrop of the morning sun. Think of that, and everything it implies. I am too full to be able to write. . . . The godlike man will, I think, remain longer with us than he himself thought at first; and if it is possible that anything choice should come out of Weimar, it will be effected by his presence."

There were many, less charitable than Wieland, who thought that Goethe's presence there was doing more harm than good: that he was encouraging the young Duke in every wild extravagance instead of checking him. There were skating-parties, hunting-parties, and

excursions to the neighbouring villages, in which all restraint was thrown aside. "Many eccentricities went on," writes Major von Knebel, a man of letters attached to the court, "which I have no pleasure in describing, which, however, did not procure us the best name in the vicinity." At the same time, Goethe gave a refined turn to their amusements; and the best proof that he kept the Duke tolerably within bounds was, that he was equally a favourite with both the Duchesses, especially the Duchess-mother. He also found means of lightening the cares of government to the Duke by counsel and aid.

Of course, all sort of calumnies were circulated; and in May 1776, Klopstock wrote to Goethe, assuming the truth of the current rumours, to warn him of the responsibility he was incurring in case the Duke's career, so promising amongst princes, should be cut short by excess. Goethe answered tartly, begging to be spared such epistles. Klopstock retorted angrily, saying that one who received well-meant advice thus was not worthy of it, and vowing that Stolberg should not come "if he listens to me, or rather if he listens to himself." It is a singular proof of the extent to which the evil reports were circulated and believed, that the bookseller Heinburg, of Berlin, ventured to publish a collection of Goethe's minor works without his permission, and stated in the advertisement that "Goethe and his bosom friend the Duke led the most dissolute life in the world. There is nothing more to hope from him, since he is besotting himself with brandy the livelong day." In the meantime, he was becoming every day more necessary to the Duke. "Goethe," writes Wieland to Merck so early as January 26, 1776, "will never again go free

from here. His Serene Highness can no more swim or wade without him." He himself had written four days before,—"I am now mixed up in all court and political matters, and shall soon be unable to get away." Whilst he was hesitating whether to go or stay, the Duke (April 1776) gave him a garden-house for his temporary residence (Viehoff says he rented it in March), and on 11th June named him privy-legation-councillor, with a salary of 1200 thalers. The patent recites that the appointment was made in consideration of "his to us sufficiently well-known qualities, his true attachment to us, and our resulting trust and confidence."

This appointment, which had no particular duties, was obviously made to fix Goethe at Weimar, and keep him about the person of the prince as a general counsellor and friend. "People of insight" (wrote the Duke) "congratulate me on the possession of this man. His head, his genius, are well known. To use a man of genius in a post other than that in which he can employ his extraordinary gifts, would be to misuse him." But subsequent appointments would seem to show that his talents for business, at all events his judgment of affairs, were laid under requisition as they became known. In January 1779, he was charged with the war commission: in September 1779, he was named privy councillor: in September 1781, 200 thalers were added to his salary, which was afterwards raised to 1800 thalers till 1816, from which year he received 3000 thalers, besides an allowance for an equipage. In April 1781, he was ennobled by imperial diploma; in June 1782, he undertook provisionally the presidency of the Chamber.

His mode of passing his time at Weimar whilst he was

there (so to speak) upon trial, may be collected from an entry in the journal which he was in the habit of sending to Augusta von Stolberg:[1]—

"*May* 18, 1776.—The hussar captain came into my garden. I rode till eleven. I breakfasted with the Duke. I went afterwards to Frau von Stein, an angel of a woman (ask your brother), whom I have so often to thank for the quieting of my heart and many of the purest sensations of pleasure, to whom I have as yet told nothing of you, which has cost me an effort. But to-day I will do it—will say to her a thousand things about Augusta. We went into my garden; her husband, her children, her brothers, two misses Alten Meer, joined us. We, too, went for a walk; met the Duchess-mother and the Prince, who joined us. We were all pleased. I left the party, went for a moment to the Duke, and supped with Frau von Stein."

This lady, who had already replaced Lili, was a striking contrast to her, and to all the preceding objects of his fugitive attachment, in *one* point—the important point of age. Charlotte von Stein (daughter of the Court-marshal von Schardt), born December 1742, was seven years older than Goethe. She was married to the Master of the Horse, Von Stein, in May 1764, and was the mother of seven children when the intimacy with Goethe commenced. She was a refined, graceful, highly cultivated, energetic woman; and Goethe (so Zimmerman told her), after seeing her *silhouette* at Strasburg, was so haunted by her image that he could not sleep for three days and nights. If we may rely on his letters to

[1] Augusta Countess von Stolberg was the sister of his friend the Count von Stolberg. At this time he and the Countess had never met. All their correspondence was of the most affectionate and confidential kind.

this lady, and forget his language of and to others, we should infer that the intensity of the attachment was in keeping with the first impression. She is "the one amongst women who gave him a love to the depths of the heart"—"who made him truly happy"—"who has, and, God willing, always will have, all his confidence." Then remembering, perhaps, that she was a married woman, he describes his relation to her as "the purest, fairest, truest, in which, with the exception of his sister, he ever stood to woman." That she fully reciprocated his feelings (platonically, it is to be hoped) may also be collected from his letters :—

"If you did not love me pre-eminently—if you only endured me alongside of others—I should be, notwithstanding, bound to devote my whole existence to you; for without you I had never been able to renounce my darling errors, could not see the world so pure, bestir myself so happily in it, as since I have nothing else to seek in it."

"Goethe's plan," says M. Goedecke, "to give the Duke an education which should make him self-dependent, was the constant quiet care of his life." To carry out this plan upon a wider scale, he bethought him of a journey to Switzerland; and they started in September 1779, the Duke travelling *incognito*, with a *suite* consisting principally of Goethe and a chamberlain. The peculiarity of the expedition was, that it was undertaken "when the mountains wore their amplest crowns of snow and nature was at its wildest." An incidental object was to bring the Duke acquainted with Lavater. Passing near Sesenheim, Goethe turned aside to spend a day and night with Frederica and her family, by whom he was received as an old and valued friend. "I must

say this of her," he writes to Frau von Stein, "that not by the slightest allusion did she attempt to awaken an old feeling in my soul. She took me to every bower, and I was obliged to sit there, and so all went well." He rejoined his party at Strasburg the day following (September 26), and writes:—

"I went to Lili, and found the pretty monkey (*grasaffen*) playing with a puppet seven weeks old, and her mother with her. There, too, I was received with surprise and joy. . . . Her husband, from all I hear, seems to be all she could wish. He was absent. I stayed to dinner. Went, after dinner, with the Duke to the cathedral. We spent an hour at the opera. Then I ate again with Lili, and went away in beautiful moonlight. I want words to express the delightful feeling which accompanied me."

It will be observed that these reminiscences of former loves are forwarded by the same post to the existing one.

They returned to Weimar on the 13th January 1780; and the improvement in the Duke, mental and bodily, was so marked, that Wieland pronounced the expedition one of Goethe's dramatic masterpieces.

In May 1782, having been recently ennobled, he made a tour to the Thüringian courts—Gotha, Meiningen, Hildburghausen, Coburg, and Rudolstadt—in a diplomatic capacity, and was received with the highest honours in each.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEATRE—DRAMATIC TROUBLES.

SOLITUDE, says Gibbon, is the nurse of genius. Society can seldom be favourable to it, especially the society of a petty court, which is exacting as well as distracting; and Goethe's self-imposed task of instructing and forming as well as amusing the Duke, left him little time for uninterrupted meditation or thought. During the ten years of his residence at Weimar, prior to the Italian journey, he did little or nothing to increase his reputation, indeed hardly anything worthy of it. He worked occasionally at 'Faust' and 'Egmont,' which he had brought with him in an unfinished state; and he composed 'Iphigenia' in a form which did not satisfy him, and which, at the same time, he felt incapable of bringing nearer to his conception of what it ought to be. It was completed, in its first shape, on the 28th, and acted at the Duchess Amalia's, before the Prince of Coburg, on the 6th April, by the amateur company of Weimar. Goethe played Orestes; Prince Constantine, Pylades; Corona Schröter, Iphigenia; Major von Knebel, Thoas.

The regular company had left Weimar after the burning of the theatre in 1774, and was replaced till

1784 by an amateur company, including the Duchess Amalia, the Duke, Prince Constantine, and other persons of distinction about the court. The most remarkable of the professional performers was Corona Schröter, a handsome woman, to whom Goethe paid a good deal of compromising attention by way of interlude to his set attachments—if he had any that could be called set. The performances were not confined to Weimar. The company was a strolling one, which visited all the neighbouring places where a stage could be improvised and an audience got together; and some of the most popular performances came off in the open air. The morals of the Weimar circle were the opposite of strait-laced: Schiller wrote to Körner that the ladies were all of them coquettes—that there was hardly one of them who had not had a *liaison;* and there is no want of charity in supposing that, in these theatrical expeditions, the intrigue was not uniformly confined to the stage. They must have been every way gratifying to Goethe, who brought out piece after piece of his own composition, chose the parts he liked best, came constantly before the footlights to be applauded as author and actor, and flirted with Corona Schröter or Amalia Kotzebue behind the scenes. But all this time the consciousness seldom left him that he was meant for better things; and the failure of one of his lighter pieces gave an opportune check to his growing fondness for the frivolities of literature and art.

On the 10th July 1782, his operetta 'Die Fischerin' was acted in the open air, on the banks of the Ilm, by torch-light. The picturesque had been carefully studied: the fishermen, their huts, their boats, their nets, having

been grouped under his personal inspection. Corona Schröter, seated by a cottage fire, was to be the central figure. Unluckily, the only rehearsal had been by daylight. The effects had been miscalculated, and things went provokingly wrong from the first. Goethe rather ungenerously threw the blame on the performers. "They committed a hundred absurdities," he wrote to Frau von Stein. "Finally, the piece went off as if one should shoot at a roe and miss, and by accident hit a hare. So is it with the effect."

The chief effect, remarks Herr Goedecke, was, that he grew sick of being "Grand Master of the Apes." Two years elapsed before he produced anything more in that capacity; and the unfavourable reception of the next of his lighter dramatic productions—'Scherz, List, und Rache' ('Jest, Craft, and Revenge'), an operetta in the Italian style, represented in December 1785—filled up the measure of his hourly-increasing restlessness and despondency, aggravated by self-reproach. Even the solace of female sympathy was marred by the reflection that his best-beloved was the wife of another—that his share in her heart was stolen property, which might be reclaimed at any time. There was clearly nothing for it but an entire change of climate and of scene—to escape from the close, confined, unhealthy atmosphere in which (intellectually speaking) he drooped or vegetated, for purer air and brighter skies; and Italy, the dream of his youth, rose before him as the promised land where his spirit would recover its elasticity, where his art-education might be completed, where his genius would once again be expansive, buoyant, and free.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE 'ITALIAN JOURNEY'—'IPHIGENIA'—'TASSO'—'EGMONT.'

GOETHE left Weimar in July 1786, as if for a short journey, without mentioning his ulterior design to any one: indeed apparently without having come to a definite decision as to his future movements. He wrote to the Duke from Carlsbad to request an unlimited leave of absence, saying that an irresistible compulsion weighed upon him to lose himself in "neighbourhoods" where he was utterly unknown:—

"I go alone, under a different name, and hope the best from this apparently singular undertaking. All I ask is, that you will make no remark on my absence. All connected with me in any way expect me from week to week; and it is well that this state of things should continue, and that I, whilst away, should be constantly expected."

He entered Italy from the Tyrol in September 1786, and remained there till June 1788, passing most of his time at Rome, but visiting the other principal cities, and including Naples and Sicily in his tour.

The 'Italian Journey' was not written, or rather not put together, till 1813. It is little more than a collec-

tion of extracts from journals and letters to friends, mostly to Madame von Stein, carelessly written, without a view to publication; but it is interspersed with fine thoughts, vivid descriptions, eloquent bursts, and discriminating remarks; and it supplies ample materials for determining the kind and degree of progress which he made:—

"God be praised!" he writes, on arriving at Venice, "how everything which was of worth in my eyes from youth upwards is again becoming dear to me! . . . How happy I feel that I can again venture to approach the ancient writers! For now I may say it—may own my disease and folly. For many years I dared not look upon a Latin author, or anything which renewed the image of Italy. If it happened by accident, I endured the most terrible torments. Herder often said, jestingly, that I learnt all my Latin from Spinoza, for he had remarked that this was the only Latin book I read; but he did not know how strictly I was obliged to keep myself from the ancients."

He travelled under the name of Müller, which he retained during the whole period of his absence from Weimar; and although the *incognito* was not strictly observed, he lived almost exclusively with artists, literary men, and men of science, giving an alternating and divided attention to architecture, painting, sculpture, botany, and poetry, as the fancy struck him, or (so to speak) driving three or four pursuits abreast. His general mode of laying out his time may be collected from the occupations of a month:—

"He spent fourteen days with Hackert at Tivoli; employed the hot weeks in completing 'Egmont;' lived some time at Frascati; and returned to Rome to draw, to learn perspective, to instruct himself in architecture, to practise

composition in landscape, and model the human form limb by limb."[1]

After repeated efforts he had reluctantly given up the hope of succeeding with the pencil or the brush; but he thought, and thought rightly, that the enjoyment and appreciation of the productions of any given art will be largely aided by the knowledge of its elementary principles and technicalities.

Two faults or defects which he had resolved to correct were: one, the disinclination to study the handicraft or mechanical part of a thing with which he had to deal; the other, the tendency to leave a work or an affair incomplete. We have seen how he set about correcting the first; and the progress he had made in correcting the second is shown by the completion of 'Iphigenia' in the metrical form.

The first reception of this drama in its metrical dress was unfavourable. People hardly knew what to make of it:—

"I am well aware," he writes from Caserta, March 16, 1787, "that my 'Iphigenia' has fared strangely. People were so accustomed to the first form; people were familiar with the expressions which they had made their own from frequent hearing and reading: now all sounds differently, and I see clearly that, *au fond*, no one thanks me for the endless pains I have been at."

This was, in no small measure, owing to its being received and judged as a tragedy after the Greek. Madame de Staël speaks of it as "the masterpiece of classic poetry with the Germans," and adds: "This tragedy recalls the kind of impression one receives in contemplating the

[1] Goedecke, p. 234.

Greek statues." A. W. Schlegel says that it "is, in truth, more nearly related to the Greek spirit than perhaps any other poetical work of the moderns; but it is not so much an antique tragedy as the reflection of it." Schiller's early impression was similarly beside the mark, although he subsequently expresses his astonishment at its ever having been thought to resemble a Greek play. The fact is, it is not a tragedy: it excites no passion of the intenser kind: there is no catastrophe; and, as most critics are now agreed, there is little Greek about it beyond the names and the groundwork of the plot. The Iphigenia of Euripides feels no repugnance to human sacrifices: she even looks forward with pleasure to the chance of having to operate with the sacrificial knife on Menelaus and Helen, should they happen to touch at Tauris on their return from Troy. Neither does she shrink instinctively from treachery or deceit.

The Iphigenia of Goethe is humane, beneficent, and high-minded. Human sacrifices are discontinued through her influence with the king; and it is only on her refusal of his hand that he insists on their being resumed, and requires her to begin with the two latest arrivals, Pylades and Orestes. On discovering who they are, she at first consents to put a deceit upon the king and escape with them; but on reflection she is shocked at the meditated falsehood: her nobler nature revolts; she confesses the plot to Thoas, and trusts to his magnanimity.

Here is contrast enough without dwelling on minor differences. It is the modern against the antique, the natural against the supernatural, truth and generosity against craft and fatalism, the Christian against the

pagan, the German against the Greek. What entitles this production to be deemed classical and (viewed as a drama or dramatic poem) a masterpiece, is the form, the language, the simplicity and measured march of the action, the unforced development of character, the fitness of the thoughts and sentiments, the perfect keeping of the whole. It is this which leads us to forget—without elevating into a merit—that his heroine is not the Iphigenia of history or tradition, and too frequently belies her country and her race.

The public whose taste was formed in the Storm and High-pressure period—the public which Goethe himself had contributed to spoil—could not be expected to come round at once at his bidding, and relish the chaste and simple in composition as highly as the meretricious and sensational. They required to be educated up to the 'Iphigenia' point. Glimpses of this state of things appear to have been breaking on him when (March 16, 1787), in reference to the reception of that work, he writes :—

"This, however, shall not deter me from undertaking a similar operation with Tasso. I would rather throw it into the fire. But I will hold to my resolution ; and since it is what it is, and no other, we will make a strange work of it."

At sea, between Ischia and Capri, March 29, 1787, he writes that he had brought with him the two first acts of 'Tasso,' written in poetical prose ten years before, and having something soft and misty about them, "which soon disappeared as, according to later views, I changed the form and introduced the rhyme." It did not receive the finishing touches till the summer of 1789, and was not published till the spring of 1790.

In 'Tasso' the persons of the drama are five: Alphonso, Duke of Ferrara; Leonora d'Este, his sister; Leonora Sanvitale, her friend; Tasso; and Antonio Montecatino, Secretary of State. The first scene is a garden, adorned with busts of the epic poets. The two ladies are introduced discoursing of poetry and poets. The Princess crowns the bust of Virgil with flowers, Leonora that of Ariosto with laurel. The conversation turns on Tasso, for whom both profess the highest admiration and regard. They are engaged in playful raillery as to which of them his verses to "Leonora" are addressed, when they are joined by the Duke, and soon afterwards by Tasso bearing a volume bound in parchment—the manuscript of his great poem, which he presents to the Duke, as belonging to him in every sense:—

"To please you was my highest wish; to delight you was my last aim. He who does not see the world in his friends deserves not that the world should hear of him."

All join in praise, encouragement, and congratulation; and the Princess, on a sign from her brother, takes the laurel crown from the bust of Virgil, and places it on the head of Tasso, who kneels to receive it. This scene —one of intoxicating delight to the poet—is interrupted by Antonio, who arrives fresh from an important mission, and on being told the meaning of the crowns, breaks into a warm commendation of Ariosto, and remarks that the man who ventures to compete with him deserves, if only for his boldness, to be crowned.

The second act opens with a long interview, sought by Tasso, with the Princess, in which he betrays his

fears, his suspicions, his wounded sensibility, his waning self-confidence, his instinctive dislike of Antonio, his galling sense of princely patronage, his distrust of her female friend, and (rather shadowed out than expressed) his boundless devotion to herself.

She replies in a manner to kindle hope, warning him at the same time that, if there are many things that may be won by vehemence, there are others which can only be obtained by moderation and self-denial :—

> "Such, it is said, is virtue, such is love,
> Which is allied to her. Think well of this."

When she leaves him, he is in the seventh heaven of enthusiasm, and so full of the milk of human kindness that, when his soliloquy is interrupted by Antonio, he bids him doubly welcome, and declares that never arrival was more agreeable :—

> "Welcome ! I know thee now, and all thy worth ;
> At once I offer thee both heart and hand,
> And hope that thou, too, dost not hold me light." [1]

Antonio draws back, and, expressing his high sense of the offer, declines it till he knows whether he shall be able to make the due return. In the ensuing dialogue, Antonio, by a mixture of calm irony and half-concealed contempt, contrives to work upon the nervous irritability of Tasso to such an extent that, regardless of the place (the ducal palace), he draws his sword and insists on bringing their differences to mortal arbitrament upon the spot. The Prince enters, and requires an explanation of the scene, in which all the wrong is ostensibly on the

[1] Translation, by Anna Swanwick, whom I have followed in the other metrical quotations.

side of the poet, although, as the Prince suspects, there was more provocation than Antonio would at first allow. Tasso is placed under nominal arrest, being ordered to keep his chamber, to which he retires after laying down, unbidden, his sword and his wreath. Antonio adopts a lofty tone, which he lowers on discovering that the Prince is favourably disposed towards Tasso and wishes to retain him at Ferrara as the chief ornament of his court. It is agreed between them that the quarrel must be made up by the aid of Leonora Sanvitale, who, it appears, is herself in love with Tasso, and proposes to the Princess that, to remove all difficulties, he shall quit Ferrara for Florence; to which the Princess consents, frankly declaring that with him will depart all that most interests her upon earth.

Tasso, when Leonora Sanvitale tells him of her plan, feigns assent, but when she leaves him, relapses into his old illusion that the whole world is conspiring against him, that all his pretended friends are false. He resolves to counteract them by going to Rome to put the last finish to his poem; and when Antonio comes to express his regrets and proffer the friendship he had formerly declined, Tasso puts it to the test by requiring that he shall use his influence to procure the Prince's assent to the plan. The Prince yields reluctantly, after warning Tasso that what he wants is rest, the absence of agitation, the repose of mind; to which he replies:—

> "Life were life no more
> Were I to cease to poetise, to feel.
> The silkworm then should be forbid to spin,
> When he already spins himself near death.

When the Prince leaves him, the Princess comes to try

her influence, and succeeds but too well; for, carried away by her expressions of sympathy, he exclaims:—

"My senses reel; my feet no more support me;
Thou draw'st me unresistingly to thee—
And to thee presses, spurning all restraints, my heart.
Wholly and for all ages hast thou won me,
So take thou my whole being with thee hence.
(*He falls into her arms, and draws her to him.*)

Princess (*pushing him from her, and hurrying away*). Away!

Leonora (*who has suffered herself to be seen while in the background, hurrying up*). What has happened? Tasso, Tasso! (*She follows the Princess.*)

Tasso (*about to follow them*). O God!

Alphonso (*who during some time has been approaching with Antonio*). He is going mad: hold him fast. [*Exit.*"

Tasso is left alone with Antonio, to whom he pours out a torrent, not of self-reproach, but complaint. It is treachery again, not his own imprudence and want of self-restraint, that has brought him to such a pass. Alphonso is a tyrant, and Antonio his willing instrument. The Princess, too, is in the plot:—

"And thou, too, siren, who didst lure me on,
So sweet, so heavenly, all at once I see thee!
Why, why, O God, so late?"

Antonio bears with him, and remonstrates. He bursts into tears, and ends by finding his sole refuge in the sympathy of the man whose tone of mind is the exact opposite of his own:—

"I know myself no more in the danger, and am no longer ashamed to own it: the helm is shattered to pieces, and the ship is cracking on all sides: the deck is rent, bursting under my very feet! I clasp you with both arms. Thus does the mariner end by clinging fast to the rock on which he was to be wrecked."

Madame de Staël says that in 'Tasso' Goethe is the Racine of Germany, which, in French estimation, is the acme of praise. The charm, as in 'Iphigenia,' consists in the harmonious flow of the language, the choice of images, the delicacy of sentiment, the elevation and grasp of thought, the natural evolution of character But it is a piece of still-life so far as action is concerned, except in the challenge scene and the scene (strangely huddled up and leading to a hardly intelligible finale) in which Tasso clasps the Princess to his heart. The grand aim throughout is to contrast the poetical temperament with the practical—the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling, with the calm, cautious, scrutinising mien of the courtier and man of the world. Both were combined in Goethe; but he had obviously himself in view whilst depicting the struggles of a man of genius in an uncongenial element, his sufferings from princely patronage and his impatience of conventional restraint. He told Eckermann that the court, the situations, the love-passages, were at Weimar as at Ferrara. If so, Alphonso was an improved and refined Charles Augustus; the two Leonoras must have been compounded out of the Grand Duchess and Madame von Stein: and we can fancy either of these ladies appropriately addressing to Goethe, after one of his frolics with the Duke, the speech in which the Princess, on Tasso calling for a tribunal of noble *men*, tells him that, if he would learn exactly what is becoming, he should address himself exclusively to noble *women*, since they are most concerned that nothing unseemly should come to pass:—

> "Propriety surrounds as with a wall
> The tender, gentle, vulnerable sex.
> Wherever reigns morality, they reign;

Wherever licence governs, they are nought.
And wiltst thou put it straight to both the sexes—
For licence struggles man, for manners woman."

"'Egmont,'" says Madame de Staël, "appears to me the finest of Goethe's tragedies: he wrote it, no doubt, when he composed 'Werther:' the same warmth of soul is to be found in these two works." It was one of the works which he took with him in an unfinished state to Italy, where he wrote the greater part of it in a very different mood from that in which he composed 'Werther.' It was begun at Frankfort, shortly prior to his departure for Weimar, as one means of distracting his thoughts from Lili:—

"After I had reflected in my manner the symbol of an important epoch in 'Götz von Berlichingen,' I looked carefully round for a similar turning-point of history. The insurrection of the Netherlands attracted my attention. In 'Götz' it was a brave man who goes down in the illusion: in times of anarchy the benevolent strong man may be of some significance. In 'Egmont' it was firmly-grounded circumstances which could not hold out against strict, well-calculated despotism."

He worked at it, as was his wont, by fits and starts; and recast the whole in the summer of 1787. It was completed in September 1787, and published in 1788.

It opens with an archery or cross-bow meeting of soldiers and citizens, from whose animated conversation we learn the political situation and feelings of the time, as well as the high esteem in which Count Egmont is held. The second scene is occupied by Margaret of Parma (the regent) in conference with her secretary, who strongly advises liberal measures and defends Egmont

from the imputation of disloyalty; but she perseveres in regarding him as responsible for the disorders that have recently broken out. Clara, the heroine, the daughter of a citizen, makes her appearance in the third act, with her mother and Brackenburg, a suitor in her own class of life, whom she sends to inquire the meaning of a disturbance in the street, and then gives passionate expression to her feelings for Egmont:—

"Have you not noticed how often I go to the window?—how I listen to every noise at the door?[1] Though I know that he will not come before night, yet, from the time when I rise in the morning, I keep expecting him every moment. Were I but a page to follow him always to the court! Could I but carry his colours to the field!"

A street tumult is appeased by Egmont, who promises the populace that all their wrongs shall be redressed if they remain quiet. He is next seen in consultation with his secretary, to whose warnings he turns a deaf ear, exclaiming:—

"I stand high, but I can and must rise yet higher! Courage, strength, and hope possess my soul. Not yet have I attained the height of my ambition: *that* once achieved, I will stand firmly and without fear."

He is equally deaf to the warnings and entreaties of the Prince of Orange, who tells him that they are both marked men: that if they wait Alva's arrival they are lost.

There is only one meeting between Egmont and Clara. He enters her humble home enveloped in a

[1] This state of feeling is gracefully reproduced and expressed in one of the minor poems of 'Violet Fane,' entitled, "He Will not Come."

cloak, and on throwing it off appears arrayed in a magnificent dress with all his orders :—

"*Egmont.* Are you satisfied? I promised to come once arrayed in Spanish fashion.

Clara. I had ceased to remind you of it. I thought you did not like it. Ah! and the Golden Fleece!"

This scene has been almost literally reproduced in 'Kenilworth,' where Leicester, to gratify a caprice of Amy's, appears similarly attired. Goethe mentioned the coincidence to Eckermann as a permissible act of borrowing between authors. Egmont is summoned to a conference by Alva, who, after making the requisite preparations for his arrest, stands anxiously watching for his arrival :—

"'Tis he! Egmont! Did thy steed bear thee hither so lightly, and started not at the scent of blood, and at the spirit with the naked sword which receives thee at the gate? Dismount! So art thou now with one foot in the grave! And—so with both!"

On hearing of Egmont's arrest and inevitable doom, Clara rushes wildly into the market-place and passionately appeals to the people to rise and rescue him. Driven to despair by the hopelessness of the attempt, she takes poison and dies. After an interview with Ferdinand, Alva's favourite son, who comes to entreat forgiveness for aiding in the arrest, Egmont falls asleep :

"[*Stage direction.* Music accompanies his slumber. Behind his couch the wall appears to open. A dazzling apparition shows itself—Freedom in heavenly garb, surrounded by a glory, resting upon a cloud. She has the features of Clara, and leans towards the sleeping hero.]"

She hails him as conqueror, and is about to place a

crown and laurel on his head, when martial music is heard in the distance; it grows louder: the vision vanishes: Egmont awakes: the soldiers appear; and he quits the prison for the scaffold in a kind of trance, with the exulting and exalted tone of one who was about to die on a well-fought field for liberty.

The real Egmont was a married man with nine children; and it was family affection and the fear of confiscation, not heroic self-sacrifice or blind self-confidence, that induced him to remain and stand the hazard of the die. Goethe was well aware of this:—

"But, for my purpose, I was obliged to convert him into a character possessing qualities which better become a young man than a man in years—an unmarried man better than a father of a family—an independent man more than one who, freely disposed as he may be, is restricted by multiform ties."

Schiller, in his celebrated criticism, besides questioning the propriety of so glaring a departure from history in the case of so well-known a character, suggests that Goethe has not succeeded in converting Egmont into a genuine hero after all, and justly objects to the melodramatic finale as destructive of all sensation of reality. But he bestows the highest praise on the power with which Alva is delineated, and on the skill with which the subtle, taciturn Orange is depicted in a single scene. He thought that, in the picture of the Duchess of Parma, the harsher features of the original are unduly softened down; and in his adaptation of 'Egmont' for the stage this character is omitted. In conversation with Eckermann, Goethe strongly condemned this omission; and when asked why he permitted it, replied,

"One is often more indifferent than is right. I was at that time deeply engaged in other matters. I cared neither for 'Egmont' nor the theatre, and let them do as they liked." The adaptation was in 1796. The character of Clärchen is full of charm; but it must be admitted that the transformation of the simple affectionate girl into a heroine and a goddess is somewhat startling and forced.

CHAPTER XIX.

DISCONTENT—CHRISTINE VULPINE—'ROMAN ELEGIES.'

BEFORE returning to Weimar, Goethe stipulated for entire freedom from irksome occupation or restraint, so as to be enabled to give his whole time and thoughts to literature. The Duke readily fell in with his wishes, and he was permitted to retain the honorary rank and pay of his appointments, upon an understanding that he should do just as much or as little official work as he thought fit. He was received with open arms by his friends, and nothing seemed wanting to make him settle down contentedly in his now finally adopted home. But his frame of mind was worse than when he started :—

"From Italy, the rich in form, I was flung back on formless Germany, to exchange a bright sky for a gloomy one. My friends, instead of comforting me and attracting me to home again, drove me to despair. My transports over objects far away, my sufferings, my complaints over the lost, seemed to offend them. All sympathy was wanting ; no one understood my language."

No wonder his friends felt hurt if this was his habitual feeling in their society. To expect them to be pleased with his absorbing interest in the country he had left, was about as reasonable as to expect Madame

von Stein to listen with sympathy to the adventure (if he told it her) of the charming Milanese to whom he was becoming (in his manner) ardently attached at Castel Gondolfo, when he discovered that she was the affianced bride of another. What by no means contributed to put him in good-humour was the account of his publisher, from which it appeared that the German public persevered in preferring works of a more sensational kind to those which he had composed with an express view to the correction of their taste.

He had come back a confirmed unbeliever, and altogether in a defiant mood against conventional modes of thinking and the regulations of society. With these predispositions he fell in (July 1788) with Christine Vulpine, the daughter of a scampish father, who had left his family to shift for themselves. She and her sisters are said to have earned their livelihood by the lighter kinds of woman's work; and it was by presenting a petition from her brother, an author in distress, that she first attracted the notice of Goethe. She is described as a young bacchante, "with a full round face, long hair, small nose, pouting lips, graceful figure, and pretty dance-loving feet."[1] She showed so little coyness that the burthen of an entire elegy is, that he did not think the less of her for her ready surrender, and that she had done no more than the goddesses of antiquity, who certainly set an edifying example in such matters.[2]

[1] Riemer, quoted by Viehoff, iii. 163.

[2] "Lass dich, Geliebte, nicht reu'n, dass du mir so schnell dich ergeben!
Glaub' es, ich denke nicht frech, denke nicht niedrig von dir.
. . . . . .
In der heroischen Zeit, da Götter und Göttinnen liebten
Folgte Begierde dem Blick, folgte Genuss der Begier."

He did not take her into his house at once; but she visited him daily, and sate by him whilst he was writing or engaged in his botanical studies. It would seem, however, that she soon became an inmate, along with her aunt and step-sister, who occupied an apartment in his house. He had several children by her, who all died young, with the exception of the eldest, August, born Christmas 1789, to whom the Duke stood godfather. In a letter to Schiller, dated July 13, 1796, Goethe alludes to the day as the eighth anniversary of his married life; but in point of fact he suffered eighteen years to pass away before he made her formally and legally his wife. The marriage took place on the 19th of October 1806. His mother corresponded with her from an early period of the connection, and received her as cordially as if she had been his legitimate wife when they came to Frankfort with the boy. Every possible allowance was made for him by his friends; but a false step of this kind is irretrievable: it entails a state of constant warfare with society; it becomes the daily source of irritation and embarrassment; it revolts the moral sense of mankind; and all attempts to gloss it over as the privileged aberration of genius will prove vain:—

> "'Tis too absurd, 'tis weakness, shame,
> This low prostration before fame—
> This casting down beneath the car
> Of idols, whatsoe'er they are,
> Life's purest, holiest decencies,
> To be careered o'er as they please."[1]

The Elegies, in which we are transported to Rome, are redolent of the spirit of antiquity. They are distin-

[1] Moore—Lines suggested by a Visit to the House where Rousseau lived with Madame de Warens.

guished by thought and feeling cast in the best classic moulds. Schlegel calls them original and yet genuine antique. But they were completed, if not composed, at Weimar, in the first year of his connection with Christine; and amongst the most interesting passages are those in which he speaks of the domestic happiness he enjoyed with her, the air of comfort she breathed around him, the calming, restorative, inspiring influence of her companionship. "It is the painting of a present love, very real and very positive, set in an Italian frame. The reality is constantly relieved by a poetical juxtaposition between the actual sentiment and the charming localities which Goethe inhabited the preceding year, and which have left their brilliant image in his memory."[1] The aptest example of this juxtaposition, or rather fusion of the amatory and the artistic, is presented by the fifth Elegy. But the tone is sensuous throughout: it is more *flesh*imental than sentimental; and we cannot accord the praise of refined feeling to the poet who tells us how he first came to understand marble by passing his hand over the rounded form of his mistress—how he composed hexameters in her arms, and counted the measure with his fingers on her back as she slept.[2]

[1] Goethe: Les Œuvres expliquées par sa Vie, par A. Mezières—i. 332. Mr Lewes says of M. Mezières, "He borrows my whole book, and ignores it." This is an astounding charge, considering that most of the materials are common property, and that M. Mezières's mode of treatment and style are essentially distinct.

[2] "Und belehr' ich mit nicht, undem ich des lieblichen Busens
Formen spähe, die Hand leite die Huften hinab,
Dann versteh' ich den Marmor erst recht.
. . . . . .
Oftmals hab' ich auch schon in ihren Armen gedichtet,
Und des Hexameters Mass leise mit fingernder Hand
Ihr auf dem Rücken gezählt."

"Weimar," we are told, "was loud in disapprobation of this new *liaison*, though it had uttered no word against the *liaison* with the Frau von Stein. The great offence seems to have been his choosing one beneath him in rank." The cases are essentially distinct. Suppose Frau von Stein had left her husband and set up house with Goethe, or suppose Goethe had chosen a young lady for his housekeeper and had a child by her, would Weimar have been silent? We shall get into endless difficulties if we try to analyse the comparative morality of reputed *liaisons* apart from the conventionalities. No doubt the low rank was an aggravation of the social offence, and rightly so, especially in the eyes of his female acquaintance. It doubled the barrier: it made the line of demarcation hard and fast; and Frau von Stein would naturally exclaim:—

"Having known me, to decline
On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than mine!"

She was five-and-forty when Goethe returned from Italy: the heyday of passion had long been over with both; and if she wished to remain on confiding affectionate terms with him, she might have followed the example of Caroline, wife of George II., who was content to leave the task of amusing his Majesty to "my good Howard," provided she retained the empire of the mind. There is a foundation of truth (although few women will allow it) in Tom Jones's apology to Sophia for his irregularities—"The delicacy of your sex cannot conceive the grossness of ours, and how little one sort of amour has to do with the heart." "I will never marry

a man," replied Sophia, very gravely, "who shall not learn refinement enough to be as incapable as I am of making such a distinction."

Indications are not wanting that Goethe, availing himself of this plea, would gladly have avoided a rupture, and probably have fallen back into his old allegiance, had he been allowed time. The tie to the mistress was sexual and domestic. It left a void in the imagination, if not the heart, which it required refinement and cultivation to fill; and he speaks of it as offering no impediment to a resumption of all his former intimacies. After complaining of Frau von Stein's altered manner on his return, he writes to her:—

"And all this before anything could be said about a connection which appears to annoy you so much. . And what sort of connection is it? Who is prejudiced by it? *Who lays claim to the feelings which I do not grudge the poor creature?*—who to the hours which I pass with her?"

He goes on to say that Frau von Stein's manner towards him has really been such as to exclude frankness; and then comes the unkindest cut of all:—

"As ill-luck would have it, you have, during a long time, scorned my advice touching coffee, and adopted a diet which is in the highest degree injurious to your health. It is not enough that it is already difficult to overcome, morally, many impressions; you strengthen the hypochondriac tormenting power of melancholy ideas by a physical means, the noxiousness of which you have long perceived, and which, out of love for me, you avoided for a time, to the improvement of your health. May the cure, the journey, turn out well! I do not quite give up the hope that you will again see me as I am."

She wrote "Oh!!!" on this letter, which he, on

reflection, seems to have thought too strong; for at the end of a week (June 8) he writes to say that it had been as painful for him to write as for her to read:—

"I will say nothing in my defence. Only I would fain entreat you. Do you yourself help me, that the connection which is offensive to you may not degenerate (*ausarte*), but remain as it is. Give me back your confidence. Look at the thing from a natural point of view. Permit me to say to you a quiet true word about it, and I can hope that all between us will be clearly and thoroughly set right."

The quiet true word most probably would have been a proposal that she should act like Queen Caroline, backed by an argument like that addressed to Sophia by Tom Jones. It would appear that she refused to listen to it; and who that values delicacy and refinement in woman will say that she was wrong? No doubt she spoke contemptuously of Goethe's taste in choosing such a companion, especially when (as her small nose and round face prognosticated) Christine became corpulent and coarse, and (as tradition goes) took to drinking. But the letter of January 1801, quoted to prove that the heart of the high-born lady had no memory but for its wounds, proves the contrary. The two passages on which stress is laid are these:—

"I did not know that our former friend Goethe was still so dear to me—that a severe illness, from which he had been suffering for nine days, would so deeply affect me. . . . The Schillers and I have already shed many tears over him in the last few days. I deeply regret now that, when he wished to visit me on New-Year's Day, I, alas! because I lay ill with headache, excused myself; and now I shall never perhaps see him again."

CHAPTER XX.

SCHILLER—THE WEIMAR THEATRE—VENETIAN EPIGRAMS.

THE next most important event in Goethe's life was the formation of his friendship with Schiller. This was long delayed and brought about with difficulty. When Schiller first visited Weimar, in 1787, Goethe was in Italy; and in one of Schiller's letters there is an invidious remark to the effect that Goethe was receiving two thousand dollars for doing nothing, whilst his official work was done by others. Schiller made no attempt to conceal his ill-feelings, dashed with envy, towards one whom he regarded as a rival,—"Once for all, this man, this Goethe, stands in my way," are his words; and after their first interview he expresses a doubt whether they shall ever come into close communication with each other, adding, "His whole nature is, from its very origin, otherwise constructed than mine: his world is not my world: our modes of conceiving things appear to be essentially different. From such a combination no secure substantial intimacy can result. Time will try."

Goethe has left on record his answering feeling of repulsion, its causes, and the manner in which it was got over. In a paper contributed to a periodical—the

'Morphologie'—after mentioning the disgust with which he heard, on his return from Italy, of the popularity of Schiller's 'Robbers' and works of the same school, he says: "I avoided Schiller, who was now at Weimar in my neighbourhood. The appearance of 'Don Carlos' was not calculated to approximate us; the attempts of our common friends I resisted; and thus we still continued to go on our way apart." This estrangement continued till they accidentally fell into conversation at Jena, and Goethe discovered that "there must certainly be some community between us, some ground whereon both of us might meet."

How rapidly and completely their friendship ripened appears from Eckermann's journal for January 18, 1825:

"That was a precious evening. The most distinguished of his contemporaries were talked over, most of all Schiller, who was so interwoven with this period—from 1795 to 1800. The theatre had given an object to the efforts of both; and Goethe's best works belong to this time. The 'Wilhelm Meister' was completed; 'Hermann and Dorothea' planned and written; 'Cellini' translated for the 'Horen;' 'Xenien' written by both for Schiller's 'Musen-Almanach.' Every day brought many points of contact. . . . He praised highly the 'Xenien' of Schiller for their force and sharpness, deeming his own insignificant and pointless in comparison. Schiller's 'Thierkreis,' said he, 'I read with ever-new admiration.' The good effects which the 'Xenien' had upon the German literature of their own time are beyond calculation."

The 'Horen' and the 'Musen-Almanach' were periodicals edited or directed by Schiller. The 'Xenien' were epigrams aimed at the leading writers, the pedants, poetasters, *pseudo*-philosophers, and Philistines of the

period, under one or other of which heads were classed all the literary opponents or adverse critics of the duumvirate. There were to have been a thousand, and several hundreds were actually composed; but very few of them are remarkable for point. Goethe went on to say of Schiller that every eight days he became other and greater than before: "Each time that I saw him, he seemed to me to have gone forward in knowledge and judgment. His letters are the fairest mementoes of him which I possess."

The different points of view from which they judged a production made them eminently useful to each other. To correct the religious indifference of 'Wilhelm Meister,' Schiller persuaded Goethe to introduce the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul." It was Goethe's constant endeavour to make Schiller more real and natural:—

"I had trouble enough with him about a scene in his 'William Tell,' where he made Gessler abruptly break an apple from the tree, and bid Tell shoot it from the boy's head. This was very uncongenial to me; and I urged him to give some motive to Gessler's conduct, by at least making the boy boast to Gessler of his father's dexterity, and say that he could shoot an apple from a tree at a hundred paces' distance. Schiller at first could see no need of this; but in the end he yielded."

It is contended on strong grounds by Herr Herman Grimm, that, although Goethe was stimulated to do more than he would otherwise have done by Schiller, he was still the same Goethe; but that Schiller underwent an entire change for the better owing to Goethe's influence.

The two friends failed most egregiously in the object for which they co-operated most cordially—the elevation

of the stage. They aimed too high; they thought only of high art: instead of making allowances for the public taste, they proceeded on the hypothesis that it was, or ought to be, on a level with their own. "The theatre at this time" (1801), writes Crabb Robinson, "was unique: its managers were Goethe and Schiller, who exhibited there the works which were to become standards and models of dramatic literature." With rare exception, these fell flat on the audience beyond the narrow precincts of the court circle; and the utmost stretch of authority could only enforce silence. On one occasion, when a loud and inopportune laugh burst from the pit, Goethe, who always occupied an arm-chair in the front row, rose and called out in a voice of thunder, "Let no one laugh;" and the effect was as instantaneous as Dr Johnson's "Where's the merriment?" upon which, says Boswell, "we all sate composed as at a funeral."

Schiller entirely went along with Goethe in the doctrine that the general public was not entitled to a voice; but after Schiller's death, Goethe gradually came round to the conviction that they had been vainly struggling against the stream. In the "Prologue for the Theatre" ('Faust'), the Manager and the Merryman have clearly the best of the argument against the Poet.

The ill success of their joint efforts was disagreeably brought home to Goethe by the incident which compelled him to retire from the management in 1817. 'The Dog of Montargis,' in which the principal part was performed by a poodle, being then in the height of its popularity, the Duke, unknown to Goethe, had entered into an engagement for its production at the Weimar theatre. Goethe, finding his opposition vain,

declared he would have nothing more to do with a theatre which admitted canine performers; and the Duke then sent him, and caused to be posted up in the theatre, a notice to the effect that, in accordance with his presumed wishes, his functions as Intendant had ceased. In a subsequent letter, beginning "Dear Friend," the Duke paved the way for a reconciliation; but Goethe adhered to his resolution of taking no further part in the direction, from which he also withdrew his son.

Amongst the dramatic productions of Goethe which failed as acting plays, to the surprise of the duumvirate and in part refutation of their theory, were 'Der Gross Kophta' ('The Great Kophta') and 'Die Natürliche Tochter' ('The Natural Daughter'). The Great Kophta is Cagliosto, and the affair of the diamond necklace supplies the materials of the plot. But, as is justly observed by M. Mezières, the drama offers less interest than the reality. The facts are too recent, the personages too well known. Emotion and curiosity are anticipated.

Schiller was enthusiastic in praise of 'The Natural Daughter,' especially of the high symbolism which permeates it. Fichte, after seeing it acted, declared it to be Goethe's masterpiece; and there is a green-room tradition that, when the actress who originally represented the heroine was rehearsing her part in Goethe's room, he burst into tears and told her to pause.

"What time," exclaimed Goethe to Eckermann, "have I not wasted with Schiller on the 'Horen' and the 'Musen-Almanach'!" He liked tranquillity; and he would hardly have engaged in the literary war of the 'Xenien' had he not been seduced into it by Schiller.

What suited him better was the friendly competition in which they were engaged when they wrote lyrical poetry in rivalry. As in the matter of the 'Xenien,' Goethe conceded the palm in this line of composition; but he did himself injustice if in this admission of inferiority he included his songs. A book might be made of them which would rival, if not excel, Heine's 'Buch der Lieder,' and fully justify Heine's ardent admiration when he exclaims: "The harmonious verses wind round your heart like a tender sweetheart: the word embraces you whilst the thought kisses you." The same may be said of Goethe's love-verses. But his ballads, speaking generally, are not equal to Schiller's. They are comparatively wanting in clearness, simplicity, and idiomatic ease. The incidents are not so natural: the stories are not so good nor so well told.

One of the most admired—"The Bride of Corinth"—leaves the reader, after the first perusal, in the most embarrassing uncertainty whether the bride is a nun, a vampire, or a ghost,—whether she comes from the convent or the grave. The effect of "The Fisherman" is sadly marred by the introduction of the water-nymph as "ein feuchter Weib" (a damp woman); and the dancing-girl in "The god and the Bayadere" would hardly have gained the Monthyon prize for virtue by lodging, in the way of her profession, a handsome young stranger for the night, and lamenting wildly over him when (not knowing him to be a god) she awakes and finds him apparently lifeless in her arms. When we are told that "the changing rhythm of the poem, and the art with which the series of events is unfolded in successive pictures, are what no other German poet has ever attained," we have

only to refer to Schiller's "Song of the Bell," where the rhythm does change in this manner. In 'Der Gott und die Bajadere' it does not change at all.

In March 1790, Goethe started for Venice to meet the Duchess Amalia. She did not arrive there till May; and he employed the interval in collecting materials for his 'Aeltere Gemälde' ('Old Pictures'), an essay on the Venetian school of painting. But the principal literary product of the expedition was the 'Venetian Epigrams,' a set of verses in which there is little epigrammatic besides the bitterness of tone which distinguishes them from the 'Roman Elegies.' "Beautiful is the land," he exclaims, "but, alas! I no longer find Faustine. This is not the Italy that I left." It never seems to have struck him that the change was in himself—that, under the influence of the disappointment and vexation with which he left Weimar, he saw everything with a jaundiced eye. The comparative failure of his latest productions, the breach with Frau von Stein and other once-cherished friends, were haunting him.

The Duke of Weimar commanded a regiment in the Duke of Brunswick's army in 1792, and Goethe accompanied him during the campaign, an account of which, compiled from diaries, he afterwards published. It contains many curious details and characteristic traits; but, although he laid in a store of maps, it conveys an indistinct notion of the campaign, and tells us next to nothing of the battle of Valmy, except that ten thousand cannonballs were discharged on each side, and that the loss on the German side was 1200.[1] He omits to state that the

[1] "Telle fut la célèbre journée du 20 Sept. 1779, on furent tirés plus de vingt mille coup de canon et appelée depuis *Canonnade de*

Germans, formed in column, were twice led on to the charge, and twice drawn back on seeing the firm attitude of the French, whom they had been taught to despise as tailors and barbers. The importance of the check—it can hardly be called defeat—was intuitively perceived by Goethe, who the same night at the bivouac oracularly declared: "From this place and from this day forth commences a new era in the world's history; and you can all say that you were present at its birth." It was this or a similar reflection that probably induced Sir E. Creasy to include the battle of Valmy among the fifteen decisive battles of the world.

Goethe had heard so much of the cannon-fever that he wanted to know what kind of thing it was. So he rode forward till the balls were playing round him :—

"The sound of them is curious enough, as if it were composed of the humming of tops, the gurgling of water, and the whistling of birds. . . . It appeared as if you were in some extremely hot place, and at the same time quite penetrated by the heat of it, so that you feel yourself, as it were, quite one with the element in which you are. The eyes lose nothing of their strength or clearness; but it is as if the world had a kind of brown-red tint, which makes the situation, as well as the surrounding objects, more impressive. I was unable to perceive any agitation of the blood; but everything seemed rather to be swallowed up in the glow of which I speak. From this, then, it is clear in what sense this condition can be called a fever."[1]

Valmy. La perte fut égale des deux côtés et s'éleva pour chaque armée à huit ou neuf cents hommes."—Thiers.

[1] 'Campaign in France in the year 1792; translated from the German of Goethe, by Robert Farie, Barrister-at-law;' p. 79. One of the few good translations from Goethe.

CHAPTER XXI.

'WILHELM MEISTER.'

LIMITED by space, I have no alternative but to pass over many of Goethe's minor productions and keep henceforth almost exclusively to those which form the landmarks of his career. Prominent amongst these is 'Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjähre' ('Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship'), begun in 1775, completed and published in 1796. It is in form a novel or romance. The hero is a stage-struck youth of the *bourgeois* or burgher class, domesticated with his parents: he is the favoured (not the only favoured) lover of an actress, Mariana; and his longing desire is to forswear the counting-house, marry her, and go upon the stage, where he expects to gain fame and fortune by her side. He is rudely awakened from this day-dream by the discovery of her infidelity; and cured, as he thinks, of his delusions, he sets out as traveller for the paternal firm to collect debts and take orders. He falls in with an actor and a pretty lively actress, Laertes and Philina, and the mental malady returns with aggravated symptoms. The drama and the stage are once again the absorbing subjects of his thoughts. In the

society of his new friends, he forms a connection with others of the class, and amongst them an insolvent manager, whom he supplies with money to set up a strolling company. They are engaged to act at the castle of a Count, who is entertaining a Prince with his suite, and Wilhelm goes with them as an amateur. The Countess takes a fancy to him, and a private interview is managed by Philina, which is becoming dangerously tender. Her head is resting on his shoulder, his arm is round her waist and their lips meet, when she tears herself away with a shriek and an exclamation, 'Fly, if you love me!' an injunction which he obeys, and they never meet again.

At the castle, he makes his first acquaintance with Shakespeare, who acts upon him like a spell. It is like the opening of a new world: the temptation to bring out 'Hamlet' is so strong that he engages to act the part at the first representation given by the troop after leaving the castle; having encountered more than one stirring adventure by the way. He stipulates that it shall be played without alteration, and the discussions to which this stipulation leads form the much-admired criticism of the play. He succeeds this time more by a happy concurrence of circumstances than by his performance, which hardly comes up to his own conception of the part, and he at length arrives at the conclusion that nature never meant him for an actor.

To analyse the rest of the story would be like analysing 'Gil Blas.' There is no unity of action: the scenes partake more and more of the episodical character; and there is a perceptible change of treat-

ment and of tone. The lady with the beautiful soul, for example, would have found herself in strange company had she been introduced at an earlier stage. The solution is, that Goethe wrote the first part when he was fresh from the management of the amateur theatre at Weimar, when his mind was full of stage business, of actor's and author's wrongs and jealousies, of the intrigues, makeshifts, and expedients with which he had become familiar behind the scenes. There can be little doubt that his high-born friends, during their nocturnal open-air representations, were occasionally as regardless of ceremony as the strollers in Hogarth's well-known engraving; and he has obviously drawn freely on their remembered irregularities in the first part of his romance. The work was completed in an altered mood and under the supervision of Schiller, who persuaded him to infuse the religious element, and would fain have excluded the tragic; but there Goethe (as he told Eckermann) stood out. It was then, also, that he added the characters which, in proportion as they are less natural, are admired as typical, and made the dialogue turn on philosophy, education, and the improvement of mankind.

Mr Carlyle speaks of 'Wilhelm Meister' as "embracing hints or disquisitions on almost every leading point in life or literature." This is going much too far; for the range, although large, is unduly restricted by the predominance given to topics connected with the stage, which made Schiller complain that it looked as if Goethe was writing *for* the players whilst merely intending to write *of* them. If he wrote (as Herr Goedecke suggests) to elevate the stage, or if (as Mr

Lewes thinks) his aim was the rehabilitation of dramatic art, he surely would not have put forward such a set of strollers as its representatives. He might have been loath to admit that he acted on Mr Puff's theory that the proper use of a plot is to bring in fine things. But he told Eckermann, "This work is an incalculable production; I myself can scarcely be said to have the key. The critic finds a central point which indeed is hard to find."

At the same time, it has been too hastily assumed that 'Wilhelm Meister' is destitute of the attractions which we expect to find in a work of fiction. There are many scenes and situations which might have found appropriate place in the most exciting novels of Charles de Bernard or George Sand. I have mentioned one (the scene with the Countess) which is most artistically worked up. The *liaison* with Mariana is a romance in itself. The appearance of the volunteer ghost at the performance of 'Hamlet' is a melodramatic surprise of the first water. The *incognita* who pays a night visit to Wilhelm may pair off with the Duchess of Fitzfulke in 'Don Juan.' To say that Mignon is an exquisitely poetical creation does her scant justice. A romantic interest, heightened by mystery, is made to hang round her to the end by a succession of artistic touches, like her song, 'Kennst du das Land' which gives the first faint indication of the land of her birth.[1] The old harper, again, equally

[1] "Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühen,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-orangen glühen?"
Mr Carlyle translates this :—
"Know'st thou the land where the citron-apples bloom,
And golden oranges in leafy gloom?"

invested with the charm of the unknown, appeals both to the fancy and the heart. Sir Walter Scott notoriously copied Fenella in 'Peveril of the Peak' from Mignon; and the harper in the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' has much in common with the harper of Goethe.

"We talked then" (continues Eckermann) "of 'Wilhelm Meister.' 'There are odd critics in this world,' said Goethe. 'They blamed me for letting the hero of this romance live so much in bad company; but I considered this so-called bad company as a vase in which I could put everything good I had to say, and I won thereby a poetical and manifold body for my work. Had I delineated the so-called good society by means of the same, nobody would have read my book.'"

May not the Bohemian habits of his own youth have had something to do with his letting Wilhelm live so much in bad company? Is it quite clear that he was sufficiently at home in the so-called good society to delineate it with the same force and truth? The objection is stated in much stronger language by Mr Carlyle:—

"'Wilhelm Meister,' it appears, is a vulgar work. No gentleman, we hear in certain circles, could have written it: few real gentlemen, it is insinuated, can like to read it; no real lady, unless possessed of considerable courage, should profess having read it at all."

He disposes of the alleged indelicacy by appealing to the high-minded Queen of Prussia, who was particularly partial to the book; and he thinks Goethe's gentility may be safely left to vindicate itself. And so it may, as Mr Carlyle understands the term—that is, as implying certain qualities of heart and mind; but this is not the sense in which it is used by those who say that no gentle-

man could have been the author of 'Wilhelm Meister.' They must mean "gentleman" in the conventional sense; and if so, they were not far wrong. The question is raised in 'Pelham' whether illegitimate birth is a bar to being perfectly a gentleman; and the decision is that it is not, provided no consciousness of the blot detracts from the feeling of social equality which is essential to the character. Low birth, or birth outside the purple in an aristocratic country, comes equally within the principle; and Wilhelm (who here represents Goethe) is painfully conscious of social inequality on that account:—

"I know not how it is in foreign countries, but in Germany a universal, and, if I may say so, personal cultivation is beyond the reach of any one except a nobleman. A burgher may acquire merit; by excessive efforts he may even educate his mind: but his personal qualities are lost, or worse than lost, let him struggle as he will. . . . Since, in common life, the nobleman is hampered by no limits—since kings or king-like figures do not differ from him,—he can everywhere advance with a silent consciousness, *as if before his equals.* Everywhere he is entitled to press forward; whereas nothing more beseems the burgher than the quiet feeling of the limits that are drawn around him."

He sees no other mode of shaking off the restraint than going upon the stage:—

"On the boards a polished man appears in his splendour with personal accomplishments, just as he does so in the upper classes of society."

Connect this with what we know of Goethe's early life and connections. He felt ill at ease in the Frankfort circle, where he met Lili. He lived almost exclusively with authors and artists during his Italian tour. When

he visited Berlin with the Duke in 1778, he maintained a studied reserve with persons of distinction about the court, and left an unfavourable impression by avoiding all communication with the literary men of note. His position at Weimar—fluctuating between superiority and inferiority, between giving and receiving the law—was fatal to ease. He never mixed in the society of a great capital like London or Paris—the society in which celebrities of all sorts meet as on a table-land—the only society which can emphatically be called the best. That its tone and spirit, therefore, are wanting in 'Wilhelm Meister,' need be no cause of wonder nor (a large class of his most cultivated German admirers will say) of regret.

"The chief ground of offence," remarks Mr Carlyle, in another place, "seemed to be that the story was not noble enough—was not, in one word, written in the style of what we call a *gentleman*. Whether it might be written in the style of a *man*, and how far these styles might be compatible, and what might be their relative worth and preferableness, was a deeper question; to which, apparently, no heed had yet been given."

Does Mr Carlyle mean it to be inferred that the two styles—the style of a *man* and the style of a *gentleman* —*are* incompatible?

The continuation, 'Wilhelm Meister's Wander Jähre' —literally, 'Wander-years'—did not appear till 1821. Whilst it was in the press, Goethe was informed by his publisher that the "copy" fell short; upon which he sent for Eckermann, and laid before him two large bundles of manuscript:—

"In these two parcels," he said, "you will find various papers hitherto unpublished: detached pieces, finished and unfinished; opinions on natural science, art, literature, and life, all mingled together. Suppose you were to make up, from these, six or eight printed sheets to fill up the gaps."

Eckermann carried out these instructions to the letter; yet of a work, already of the most fragmentary and miscellaneous character, completed in this fashion, Mr Carlyle does not hesitate to say that it is "one of the most perfect pieces of composition Goethe ever produced. . . . It coheres so beautifully within itself."

Mr Lewes says: "I quarrel with no man who finds delight in the book; but candour compels me to own that I find in it almost every fault a work can have. It is unintelligible, it is tiresome, it is fragmentary, it is dull, and it is often ill written." The truth lies between the two; but Mr Lewes comes much the nearest to it, as he admits the excellence of detached passages; whilst Mr Carlyle's estimate is simply one of those extravagant paradoxes which sadly impair the weight of his authority.

CHAPTER XXII.

'HERMANN AND DOROTHEA'—'ELECTIVE AFFINITIES'—BETTINA.

'HERMANN and Dorothea' was published in 1797. The plot is taken from a story of the Salzburg emigration of 1731. But to facilitate the introduction of contemporary views and topics, Goethe has laid the scene between sixty and seventy years later in a small town on the right bank of the Rhine. Hermann is the son of the wealthy landlord of the Golden Lion, who is bent on a rich marriage for him: the mother is only anxious for his happiness. A body of refugees from the left bank, flying from the French republicans, are passing near the town on their way to the interior. Hermann is sent by his parents, both excellent warm-hearted people in their way, with a cargo of clothes and refreshments for the emigrants. He overtakes a waggon drawn by two stout oxen, driven by Dorothea, a robust comely damsel, to whom he is irresistibly attracted at first sight.

He supplies the immediate wants of the persons in the waggon, intrusts the rest of his stock to Dorothea to be distributed amongst her fellow-sufferers, and drives back "so thoughtful and pensive, and so prone to seclu-

sion," that his mother, with true feminine instinct, divines his state of feeling, and on his declaring that he could never be happy without Dorothea, undertakes to plead his cause with his father. The father is angry and unreasonable at the threatened disappointment of his hopes; but she is backed by two steady frequenters of the house—the parson and the apothecary; and at length it is agreed that these two shall accompany Hermann to the place where Dorothea is expected to be found, and report upon the fitness of his choice. These two, it should be added, occupy a considerable space in the poem by dialogues in which their characters are finely contrasted. What they hear of Dorothea is more than enough to exalt her into a heroine. She combines courage and presence of mind with every feminine quality desirable in a wife. Unluckily, she is still in mourning for a betrothed, and wears a ring, the token of the tie. This embarrasses Hermann to such an extent that, when he is beginning to explain his intentions, she fancies he has come to hire her as a servant; and, thinking she cannot do better under the circumstances, she at once expresses her willingness to accompany him to his mother's house in that capacity. The consequence is, that when the party return, and the parents, on the report of the friends, are prepared to receive her as a daughter-in-law, they are all at cross-purposes till an explanation is brought about, when Dorothea confesses to a reciprocal interest in Hermann from their first meeting; and they are married with a chorus of approbation.

The charm of the poem arises from the thoughts, feelings, illustrations, images, digressions, and episodes with which this meagre outline is filled up. Schiller was warm

in its praise. "His epic poem," he writes to Meyer, "you have read: you will admit that it is the pinnacle of his and all our modern art. I have seen it grow up, and have wondered almost as much at the manner of its growth as at the completed work. It is incredible with what ease he now reaps the fruits of a well-bestowed life and a persistent culture." Goethe told Eckermann—

"It is almost the only one of my larger poems which still satisfies me: I can never read it without strong interest. I love it best in the Latin translation: there it seems to me nobler, and as if it had returned to its original form."

It is indeed a noble poem. There is an elevation of tone, a reach and variety of observation and reflection, a discrimination of character, a truth and delicacy of touch, which fully justify his pride; and Dorothea is a splendid exception to his women, whom he rarely gifts with the finer and more ennobling qualities of the sex. Why he liked it best in the Latin translation is clear: no modern language lends itself effectively to the Homeric metre, the hexameter, for the plain reason that, no modern language being marked by quantity, the lines are only scanned by accent, which is variable and difficult to fix. What gives pleasure in modern hexameters, so far as metre is concerned, is the classical association. A person unacquainted with Greek and Latin, would require time and training to discover them to be poetry; and they are least adapted to domestic or purely national subjects. For this reason, it may doubted whether Goethe was not guilty of an error of judgment when he adopted this metre, either for his 'Hermann and Dorothea,' or for the rhythmical version of 'Reinecke Fuchs,' which he undertook in 1794.

Goethe's marriage took place on the 19th October 1806. About this time (being then fifty-seven) he was falling desperately in love with a young girl whom he had known from a child, Minnie Herzlieb, the adopted daughter of a Jena bookseller. His novel 'Wahlverwandtschaften' ('Elective Affinities'), was composed by way of safety-valve, according to his avowed practice of letting off oppressive sensations by a poem or a book. "In it," he says, "as in a burial-urn, I have deposited with deep emotion many a sad experience. The 3d of October 1809, set me free from the work; but the feelings it embodies can never quite depart from me."

The underlying theory is, that human hearts resemble chemical substances as regards mutual attraction. A and B come into contact with C and D. A and C are irresistibly attracted to each other; so are B and D: and thus two new combinations are formed. These are cases of elective affinity. The A and B of the novel are Edward and Charlotte. They had been attached in early youth, but, each having been forced to contract a *mariage de raison*, they were not united till they had arrived at middle age, when they might be supposed to know their own minds; and the example is therefore the more striking when the irresistible law of affinity begins to operate. Edward proposes to invite an intimate friend, the "Captain," to take up his abode with them for a time. Charlotte objects from an intuitive sense of danger, but eventually consents on condition that her niece, Ottilie, shall also become a member of the family. The Captain and Ottilie are C and D. Charlotte and the Captain find out that nature meant them for one another; and a corresponding discovery is made by

Edward and Ottilie. But Charlotte and the Captain are content to settle down into quiet platonism; whilst Edward and Ottilie are the victims of an all-absorbing passion, which constantly points to a catastrophe, although it does not hurry them into guilt.

After vainly trying the effect of a long absence, Edward proposes a divorce, which would enable him to marry Ottilie and the Captain to marry Charlotte. The Captain objects, on the ground that such an arrangement would be strongly condemned by society. Charlotte, favourable at first, withdraws her consent on finding that she is about to become a mother. The child to which she gives birth raises a physiological problem, as it bears a striking resemblance to both the Captain and Ottilie. It is drowned whilst under the charge of Ottilie, who, distracted by this new misery, vows she will never hold communication with Edward again. She pines away, refuses food, and dies of grief and inanition. Edward, unable to live without her, dies soon afterwards. Charlotte, who has shown no symptoms of jealousy—indeed done her best to make matters easy, with the exception of the divorce—has him buried in the same grave with Ottilie; and the work concludes with this reflection, by way of moral:—

"So the lovers rest side by side. Peace hovers over their grave: bright kindred angel-forms look down upon them from the vaulted ceiling; and what a happy moment will it be when they one day awake together!"

Strange to say, the scene of this novel which gave rise to the hottest controversy and the greatest variety of opinion, is a conjugal interview between Edward and

Charlotte, of the ordinary and most unexceptional kind in itself, but still one which I cannot venture to reproduce.

The affair with Minna Frohmann is oddly enough connected with the romance (and it is a romance, in more senses than one) of Bettina Brentano, who is accused of printing, as addressed to herself, verses which were addressed to Minna. A child in years as well as appearance, as she wishes us to believe, although in reality a woman past twenty-one, Bettina engages, on the strength of an uncontrollable enthusiasm, in a correspondence with Goethe whom she has never seen, and then pays him a visit, which she narrates in a letter to his mother, beginning with a description of his house:—

"The highest simplicity is at home in the rooms—ah, so inviting! Fear not, said the modest walls; he will come, and will be, and will not wish to be, more than thou. And then the door opened; and there he stood in solemn earnestness, and gazed upon me with an unmoved look. I stretched my hands towards him, I believe. I soon was conscious of nothing more. Goethe clasped me suddenly to his heart. 'Poor child! have I frightened you?' These were the first words with which his voice went at once to my heart. He carried me into his room, and placed me opposite to him on the sofa.

"Then we were both dumb. At last he broke the silence. 'You have, no doubt, read in the newspaper that I have recently sustained a heavy loss by the death of the Duchess Amalia.' 'Ah, I never read the newspaper.' 'So! I thought that everything which took place at Weimar interested you.' 'No; nothing interests me but you,—and I am much too impatient to look through the newspaper.' 'You are an amiable child.' Long pause; I banished to the fatal sofa,

so painfully. 'You know that it is impossible for me to sit so well-behaved?' Ah, mother! can one be so beside one's self? I suddenly said, 'I cannot stay here upon the sofa,' and sprang up. 'Well,' said he, 'make yourself comfortable.' Then I flung myself on his neck. He took me upon his knee, and pressed me to his heart. Still, completely still was it,—all vanished. I had not slept for such a time. Years had passed in longing for him. I fell asleep on his breast, and when I awoke began a new life. And this time I will write no more."

If we are to believe her story, and trust to the authenticity of the correspondence, Goethe encouraged and returned, or pretended to return, her passion, till he got tired of her. But passages, perhaps the tenderest, have obviously been interpolated in his letters; and little reliance can be placed on the evidence of her own. Still, it is difficult to believe that he did not trifle with her or indulge his vanity at her expense; and considering his uniform treatment of women, it strikes me that a good deal of indignation at the alleged misconstruction of his conduct has been misplaced or thrown away. With regard to the verses, might they not have been made to do double duty, like the beautiful song, "Da droben auf jenem Berge," to which two objects of his adoration simultaneously laid claim?

CHAPTER XXIII.

AS A MAN OF SCIENCE.

GOETHE'S contributions to science would have made a high reputation for any man who did not already occupy a pre-eminent position in literature. The author of 'Faust' has thrown the author of the 'Metamorphoses of Plants' into the shade. But his claim to rank amongst the most profound and original thinkers on scientific subjects is now universally acknowledged; and it is not without ground that his countrymen have declared him the precursor of Darwin. The essence of his botanical lucubrations was, that the entire plant, including fruit and flowers, is evolved from the leaf, or, in other words, is a modification or transformation of it. This theory is developed in the 'Metamorphoses of Plants,' published in 1790. His regular publisher refused to undertake the book, believing that it would turn out a dead loss; and its first reception went far to justify the fear. But botanists have gradually come round to the conviction that he was right,—at all events, that he struck out the idea on which the established theory is based. Another notion of his was, that all plants are derived from one original plant. "There

must," he argued, "be such a one; how otherwise could I know that this or that formation is the same, if they were not all formed after one model?"

Pursuing the same method of simplification, he arrived at the vertebral structure of the skull. When he was at Venice in 1790, his servant jestingly took up the fragment of an animal's skull from the Jewish cemetery and offered it to him as a Jew's skull. This fragment let in light upon a preconceived theory. It was like Newton's apple. Here, again, he rather indicated the truth than developed it; but he laid the foundation of the theory that osseous forms, like vegetable, are all traceable to one and the same type.

His most remarkable discovery was that of the intermaxillary bone (the centre bone of the upper jaw) in man, the existence or identity of which was fiercely contested by anatomists till he placed it beyond a doubt. He was not so fortunate in his 'Farben Lehre' ('Doctrine of Colours'), in which he comes into direct collision with Newton, contending that white light, instead of being composed of the prismatic colours, is perfectly simple, and that colours are produced by a transparent medium between light and darkness. This work contains many valuable observations, and was thought worthy of translation by no less a person than the late President of the Academy, Sir Charles Eastlake. But the scientific world would not pay it the compliment of a refutation or even of a fair hearing. Cuvier spoke of it as beneath the notice of the Institute; and Goethe had nothing for it but to declaim against the blindness and injustice of mankind. "As for what I have done as a poet," he told Eckermann, "I take no pride in it

whatever. Excellent poets have lived at the same time with myself; more excellent poets have lived before me, and will come after. But that, in my century, I am the only person who knows the truth in the difficult science of colours—of *that*, I say, I am not a little proud." (Goethe's claims as a man of science are fully and clearly stated by Mr Lewes, who, book v. chap. 9, has devoted forty pages to the subject.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

'FAUST.'

'FAUST,' considered as a whole, belongs to no particular period. It was the work of the author's literary life. Nearly sixty years intervened between the commencement and the completion. He sealed it up a finished work shortly before his last birthday; and there is reason to believe that the conception was in his mind as early as 1769, although he may not have begun to give bodily form to it before 1773. In what follows, 'Faust' must be understood as the First Part unless the Second is specified.

A jocular epistle from Götter, thanking Goethe for 'Götz von Berlichingen,' dated June 1773, ends thus:

"Schieb mir dafür den Doctor Faust,
So bald dein Kopf ihn ausgebraust."
("Send me the Doctor Faust as soon as thy head has worked him off.")

In October 1775, Goethe writes to Merck, that he had been hard at work on 'Faust;' and on the 25th of that month his bookseller intimated to Merck that "for a proportional price" he would rather have published 'Faust' than 'Stella.' But although the completed

scenes were freely communicated to friends, no portion of it was published till it appeared as 'Faust: ein Fragment,' in 1790, in the seven-volume edition of his works. There is no prologue or dedication in this edition. The scene in which Mephistopheles is introduced in the guise of a travelling scholar, that in which Valentine is killed, with parts of others, are wanting; and the poem ends with the Cathedral scene. It was first published in its completed state, as we now have it, in 1808.[1]

The Prologue for the Theatre is curious as embodying the contrasted views which may be supposed to have presented themselves to Goethe's mind during his and Schiller's vain struggle with the theatrical public of Weimar. This Prologue takes the form of a colloquy between the Manager, the Theatre-poet, and the Merryman; in which the poet complains that the kind of piece required of him is degrading to his high vocation.

The Prologue in Heaven, commonly regarded as the key-note of the poem, opens with a fine choral hymn by the three Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael. Then follows a dialogue between the Lord and Mephistopheles, obviously suggested by the Book of Job.

"*The Lord.* Do you know Faust?
Mephistopheles. The Doctor?
The Lord. My servant?
Mephistopheles. Verily! he serves you after a fashion

[1] Mr Lewes, italicising the statement, says: "In 1797, *the whole was remodelled.* Then were added the two Prologues, the 'Walpurgis Nacht,' and the Dedication. In 1801 he completed it as it now stands, retouching it, perhaps, in 1806, when it was published." It certainly was not remodelled in 1797, unless adding be remodelling; and I know no authority for saying that it was published in 1806.

of his own. The fool's meat and drink are not of earth. The ferment of his spirit impels him towards the far away. He himself is half conscious of his madness. Of heaven—he demands its brightest stars; and of earth—its every highest enjoyment; and all the near, and all the far, contents not his deeply-agitated breast.

The Lord. Although he does but serve me in perplexity now, I shall soon lead him into light. When the tree buds, the gardener knows that blossom and fruit will deck the coming years.

Mephistopheles. What will you wager? you shall lose him yet. If you give me leave to guide him quietly my own way.

. . . . . .

The Lord. Enough, it is permitted thee. Divert this spirit from his original source, and bear him, if thou canst seize him, down on thy own path with thee. And stand abashed, when thou art compelled to own—a good man, in his dark strivings, may still be conscious of the right way."

The first scene — Night — shows Faust in a high-vaulted Gothic chamber, seated restless at his desk, and soliloquising on the vanity of learning and knowledge. He opens a book of magic, and, after contemplating with rapture the sign of the Macrocosm, pronounces mystically the sign of the Spirit of the Earth, which appears in a red flame. He quails before it, and the Spirit vanishes with an expression of contempt:—

"*Spirit.* Thou art mate for the spirit whom thou conceivest, not for me. (*The Spirit vanishes.*)

Faust (*collapsing*). Not for thee! For whom, then? I, the image of the Deity, and not mate for even thee! (*A knocking at the door.*) O death! I know it: that is my amanuensis. My fairest fortune is turned to nought. That the unidea'd groveller must disturb this fulness of visions! (*Wagner enters, in his dressing-gown and night-cap, with a lamp in his hand. Faust turns round in displeasure.*)"

After getting rid of Wagner, he reverts to the exalted train of thought, which is pursued in some magnificent lines, till the notion of casting off this mortal coil by poison occurs to him :—

"*Faust.* But why are my looks fastened on that spot? is that phial there a magnet to my eyes? Why, of a sudden, is all so exquisitely bright, as when the moonlight breathes round one benighted in the wood? I hail thee, thou precious phial, which I now take down with reverence; in thee I honour the wit and art of man. Thou abstraction of kind soporific juices, thou concentration of all refined deadly essences, vouchsafe thy master a token of thy grace! I see thee, and the pang is mitigated; I grasp thee, and the struggle abates; the spirit's flood-tide ebbs by degrees. I am beckoned out into the wide sea; the glassy wave glitters at my feet; another day invites to other shores."

He places the goblet to his lips, when the sound of bells and voices singing the Easter anthem reaches him :—

"*Faust.* Why, ye heavenly tones, subduing and soft, do you seek me out in the dust? Peal out, where weak men are to be found! I hear the message, but want faith. Miracle is the pet child of faith. I dare not aspire to those spheres from whence the glad tidings sound; and yet, accustomed to this sound from infancy, it even now calls me back to life. In other days, the kiss of heavenly love descended upon me in the solemn stillness of the Sabbath; then the full-toned bell sounded so fraught with mystic meaning, and a prayer was burning enjoyment. A longing, inconceivably sweet, drove me forth to wander over wood and plain, and amidst a thousand burning tears, I felt a world rise up to me. This anthem harbingered the gay sports of youth, the unchecked happiness of spring festivity. Recollection now holds me back, with childlike feeling, from the last decisive step. Oh, sound on, ye sweet heavenly strains! The tear is flowing, earth has me again."

He is next seen walking with Wagner amongst the country people, who are making merry in honour of the season. They receive him with acclamation, in grateful remembrance of services rendered by his father and himself during a pestilence. With a remorseful recollection of the real nature of these services, he declares that their applause sounds like derision in his ears. Wagner consoles him with a commonplace reflection, and he resumes:—

"*Faust.* Oh happy he who can still hope to emerge from this sea of error! We would use the very thing we know not, and cannot use what we know. But let us not embitter the blessing of this hour by such melancholy reflections. See how the green-girt cottages shimmer in the setting sun! He bends and sinks—the day is overlived. Yonder he hurries off, and quickens other life. Oh that I have no wing to lift me from the ground, to struggle after, for ever after, him! I should see, in everlasting evening beams, the stilly world at my feet—every height on fire—every vale in repose—the silver brook flowing into golden streams. The rugged mountain, with all its dark defiles, would not then break my godlike course. Already the sea, with its heated bays, opens on my enraptured sight. Yet the god seems at last to sink away. But the new impulse wakes. I hurry on to drink his everlasting light,—the day before me and the night behind,—the heavens above, and under me the waves. A glorious dream! as it is passing, he is gone. Alas! no bodily wing will so easily keep pace with the wings of the mind! Yet it is the inborn tendency of our being for feeling to strive upwards and onwards; when, over us, lost in the blue expanse, the lark sings its trilling lay; when, over rugged pine-covered heights, the outspread eagle soars; and over marsh and sea the crane struggles onwards to her home."

His attention is attracted by a black dog, which follows him home and enters his study along with him. He

opens the Bible, and reads, "In the beginning was the Word," for which he proposes to substitute, "In the beginning was the Deed:"—

"*Faust.* If I am to share the chamber with you, poodle, cease your howling—cease your barking. I cannot endure so troublesome a companion near to me. One of us two must quit the cell. It is with reluctance that I withdraw the rights of hospitality; the door is open—the way is clear for you. But what do I see? Can that come to pass by natural means? Is it shadow—is it reality? How long and broad my poodle grows! He raises himself powerfully; that is not the form of a dog! What a phantom I have brought into the house!—he looks already like a hippopotamus, with fiery eyes, terrific teeth. Ah, I am sure of thee! Solomon's key is good for such a half-hellish brood."

The poodle takes refuge behind the stove, and seems on the point of vanishing into mist, when, at the threat of a still stronger spell than has yet been tried, Mephistopheles comes forward, as the mist sinks, in the dress of a travelling scholar. An animated colloquy ensues, in the course of which Mephistopheles suggests that they may possibly come to terms another time, but requests leave to depart for the present. Faust tells him to get out as he got in, and refuses to remove the pentagram on the threshold, but allows Mephistopheles to invoke spirits, who sing Faust to sleep, and to summon a rat, who gnaws away the obstacle. Mephistopheles escapes, but directly afterwards reappears in the familiar costume of scarlet, silk mantle and cock's feather in his hat, "like a youth of condition," and tells Faust to array himself in the same manner, that, unrestrained, emancipated, he may try what life is. Before starting they make a compact, signed by Faust with his blood:—

"*Mephistopheles.* I will bind myself to your service *here*, and never sleep nor slumber at your call. When we meet on *the other side*, you shall do as much for me.

Faust. I care little about *the other side:* if you first knock this world to pieces, the other may arise afterwards if it will. My joys flow from this earth, and this sun shines upon my sufferings: if I can only separate myself from them, what will and can, may come to pass. I will hear no more about it—whether there be hating and loving in the world to come, and whether there be an Above or Below in those spheres like our own. . . . If ever I stretch myself, calm and composed, upon a couch, be there at once an end of me. If thou canst ever flatteringly delude me into being pleased with myself—if thou canst cheat me with enjoyment —be that day my last. I offer the wager.

Mephistopheles. Done!

Faust. And my hand upon it! If I ever say to the passing moment—'Stay, thou art so fair!' then mayst thou cast me into chains; then will I readily perish; then may the death-bell toll; then art thou free from thy service. The clock may stand, the index-hand may fall: be time a thing no more for me!"

Whilst Faust is absent to prepare for the expedition, Mephistopheles puts on his cap and gown and receives a student, with whom the famous dialogue on the studies of the University—logic, jurisprudence, theology, chemistry, medicine—takes place.

Mephistopheles seems to have thought more of winning his wager with the Lord than of keeping his compact with Faust, when he took him first to Auerbach's Cellar, which could have afforded little pleasure to the Doctor, although the scene laid in it is one of the most spirited and most admired in the poem. Nor was it without reason that Faust exclaims, on entering the "Witches' Kitchen" (the next scene):—

"I loathe this mad concern of witchcraft. Do you promise me that I shall recover in this chaos of insanity? Do I need an old hag's advice? And will this mass of cookery really take thirty years from my body? Woe is me, if you know of nothing better!"

Whilst they are waiting for the witch, Faust stands before a looking-glass:—

"*Faust.* What do I see? What a heavenly image shows itself in this magic mirror! O Love! lend me the swiftest of thy wings, and bear me to her region! Ah! when I stir from this spot, when I venture to go near, I can only see her as in a mist. The loveliest image of a woman! Is it possible—is woman so lovely? Must I see in these recumbent limbs the innermost essence of all Heavens? Is there anything like it upon earth?"

When he has had his dose, he asks to be allowed to look another moment in the glass:—

"*Mephistopheles.* Nay, nay; you will soon see the model of all womankind in flesh and blood. (*Aside.*) With this draught in your body you will soon see a Helen in every woman you meet."

He sees a Helen in Margaret, and insists on the immediate possession of her. Mephistopheles tells him that she is not to be carried by storm, but takes him to her chamber whilst she is absent, and deposits a casket of jewels in her clothes-press. She enters, puts them on, and walks before the looking-glass:—

"If the earrings were but mine! one cuts quite a different figure in them. What avails your beauty, poor maiden? That may be all very pretty and good, but they let it all be. You are praised, half in pity; but after gold presses——on gold hangs—everything. Alas for us poor ones!"

The seduction thus begun is completed by the aid

of a complacent friend, Martha, a widow with whom Mephistopheles gets acquainted by a stratagem which leads to an amusing dialogue. He then proposes to bring Faust:—

"*Mephistopheles.* And the young lady will be here too?—a fine lad! has travelled much, and shows all possible politeness to the ladies.

Margaret. I should be covered with confusion in the presence of the gentleman.

Mephistopheles. In the presence of no king on earth.

Martha. Behind the house there, in my garden, we shall expect you both this evening."

The next scene but one is headed "Garden." Margaret on Faust's arm, Martha with Mephistopheles, walking up and down. The love-making proceeds rapidly, and then we have Faust in the forest vainly endeavouring to break from the fascination, and already writhing under anticipated remorse:—

"*Faust.* What are the joys of heaven in her arms? Let me kindle on her breast! Do I not feel her wretchedness unceasingly? Am I not the outcast—the houseless one?—the monster without aim or rest—who, like a cataract, dashed from rock to rock, in devouring fury towards the precipice? And she, upon the side, with childlike simplicity, in her little cot upon the little mountain field, and all her homely cares embraced within that little world! And I, the hated of God—it was not enough for me to grasp the rocks and smite them to shatters! Her, her peace must I undermine! —Hell, thou couldst not rest without this sacrifice! Devil, help me to shorten the pang! Let what must be, be quickly! Let her fate fall crushing upon me, and both of us perish together!"

In the next Garden Scene she asks him if he believes in God:—

"*Faust.* My love, who dares say, I believe in God? You may ask priests and philosophers, and their answer will appear but a mockery of the questioner.

Margaret. You don't believe, then?

Faust. Mistake me not, thou lovely one! Who dare name Him? and who avow, 'I believe in Him'? Who feel—and dare to say, 'I believe in Him not'? The All-embracer the All-sustainer, does He not embrace and sustain thee, me, Himself? Does not the heaven arch itself there above? Lies not the earth firm here below? And do not eternal stars rise, kindly twinkling, on high? Are we not looking into each other's eyes, and is not all thronging to thy head and heart, and weaving in eternal mystery, invisibly—visibly, about thee? With it fill thy heart, big as it is, and when thou art wholly blest in the feeling, then call it what thou wilt! Call it Bliss!—Heart!—Love!—God! I have no name for it! Feeling is all in all. Name is sound and smoke, clouding heaven's glow.

Margaret. That is all very fine and good. The priest says nearly the same, only with somewhat different words.

Faust. All hearts in all places under the blessed light of day say it, each in its own language—why not I in mine?"

In conversation with Eckermann, Goethe complained of people treating God as if the most inconceivable, sublimest of Beings was their equal. "Otherwise they would not say 'the Lord God,' 'the dear God,' 'the good God.' He becomes to them, especially to the priests, who have Him daily in their mouth, a phrase, a mere name. If they were duly impressed by His greatness, they would be mute and refrain from naming Him out of reverence."

On Margaret's saying that she would gladly leave her door unbolted at night, but that her mother did not sleep sound, Faust gives her a phial, from which she is to pour three drops into her mother's drink. Under diabolical influence, it acts as poison. The mother

dies. Margaret finds herself with child, and is depicted praying to the Mater Dolorosa to rescue her from shame and death. Her shame becomes public: her brother Valentine finds Faust under her window with Mephistopheles singing to the guitar: a fight ensues: Valentine receives a mortal wound, and dies reproaching his sister as the guilty cause of his death. This is followed by the fine scene in the cathedral, where Margaret is haunted by the Evil Spirit and horror-stricken by the seeming application to herself of the "Dies iræ, dies illa."

The "Walpurgis Nacht" ("May-Day Night") must be regarded as a splendid episode, most of it having no bearing on the main action or plot of the poem. The scene is the Harz Mountains, where the witches are holding their Sabbath. On reaching the place of meeting, Faust and Mephistopheles find, besides witches and wizards, representative characters (General, Minister, Parvenu, Author) moralising on the degeneracy of the age; and, amongst many other strange objects, Faust has a foreboding vision of the fate of his beloved:—

"*Faust.* Mephisto, do you see yonder a pale, fair girl standing alone and far off? She drags herself but slowly from the place: she seems to move with fettered feet. I must own, she seems to me to resemble poor Margaret. . . . What bliss! what suffering! I cannot tear myself from that look. How strangely does a single red line, no thicker than the back of a knife, adorn that lovely neck!"

No description can convey more than a very faint notion of the Intermezzo supposed to be performed by a *dilettante* company on the Blocksberg, the *dramatis personæ* being a motley crew, with each a couplet or two assigned

to them, the point of which (when there is a point) can only be made intelligible by notes.

"A Gloomy Day—A Plain.—Faust, Mephistopheles," is the succeeding scene, in prose—the only prose scene in the poem:—

"*Faust.* In misery! Despairing! Long a wretched wanderer upon the earth, and now a prisoner! The dear, unhappy being, cooped up in the dungeon, as a malefactor, for horrid tortures! Even to that! to that! Treacherous, worthless Spirit, and this hast thou concealed from me! Stand, only stand! roll thy devilish eyes infuriated in thy head! Stand and brave me with thy unbearable presence! A prisoner! In irremediable misery! Given over to evil spirits, and to sentence-passing, unfeeling man! And me, in the meantime, hast thou been lulling with tasteless dissipations, concealing her growing wretchedness from me, and leaving her to perish without help."

In reply to the passionate appeals of Faust, Mephistopheles declares that his powers are limited:—

"*Mephistopheles.* I will conduct thee, and what I can, hear! Have I all power in heaven and upon earth? I will cloud the jailer's senses; do you possess yourself of the keys, and bear her off with human hand. I will watch! The magic horses will be ready; I will bear you off. This much I can do.

Faust. Up and away!

. . . . . .

NIGHT.—OPEN PLAIN.

FAUST *and* MEPHISTOPHELES *rushing along upon black horses.*

Faust. What are they working—those about the Ravenstone yonder?

Mephistopheles. Can't tell what they're cooking and making.

Faust. Are waving upwards — waving downwards — bending—stooping.

Mephistopheles. A witch company.

Faust. They are sprinkling and charming.

Mephistopheles. On! on!"

Retzsch's outline represents a stone mound, with a gallows at one end and a gibbet for hanging in chains at the other. Witches and skeletons are upon, about, and over it, engaged in some unhallowed rite. The scene, like the vision of Margaret on the Brocken, is a finely-managed foreboding of her fate.

The concluding scene, "The Dungeon," is quite perfect in its way. Nothing can go beyond it in pathos and truth to nature. Ophelia alone can compare with Gretchen in her last hour of trial. The effect depends upon the admirable keeping of the whole. But it may be as well to quote the conclusion. On Faust's proposing to take Gretchen away, her mind wanders, the horrors of her past life, of her actual situation, flit before her as in a ghastly dream:—

"*Margaret.* Quick, quick! Save thy poor child. Away! Keep the path up by the brook—over the bridge—into the wood—to the left where the plank is—in the pond. Only quick and catch hold of it! it tries to rise! it is still struggling! Help! help!

Faust. Be calm, I pray! Only one step, and thou art free.

Margaret. Were we but past the hill! There sits my mother on a stone—my brain grows chill!—there sits my mother on a stone, and waves her head to and fro. She beckons not, she nods not, her head is heavy; she slept so long, she'll wake no more. She slept that we might enjoy ourselves. Those were pleasant times!

. . . . . .

Faust. The day is dawning! My love! my love!

Margaret. Day! Yes, it is growing day! The last day is breaking in! My wedding-day it was to be! Tell no one that thou hadst been with Margaret already. Woe to my garland! It is all over now! We shall meet again, but not at the dance. The crowd thickens; it is not heard. The square, the streets, cannot hold them. The bell tolls! —the staff breaks! How they bind and seize me! Already am I hurried off to the blood-seat! Already quivering for every neck is the sharp steel which quivers for mine. Dumb lies the world as the grave!

Faust. Oh that I had never been born!

Mephistopheles appears without. Up! or you are lost. Vain hesitation! Lingering and prattling! My horses shudder; the morning is gloaming up.

Margaret. What rises up from the floor? He! He! Send him away! What would he at the holy place? He would me!

Faust. Thou shalt live!

Margaret. Judgment of God! I have given myself up to thee.

Mephistopheles to Faust. Come! come! I will leave you in the scrape with her.

Margaret. Thine am I, Father! Save me, ye Angels! Ye Holy Hosts, range yourselves round about, to guard me! Henry, I tremble to look upon thee!

Mephistopheles. She is judged!

Voice from above. Is saved!

Mephistopheles to Faust. Hither to me!

(*Disappears with Faust.*)

Voice from within, dying away. Henry! Henry!"

As I have said in another place, the more poetical interpretation of this scene is, that Margaret dies after uttering the last words assigned to her: that the judgment of heaven is pronounced upon her as her spirit parts: that Mephistopheles announces it in his usual

sardonic and deceitful style: that the *voice from above* makes known its real purport; and that the *voice from within, dying away,* is Margaret's spirit calling to her lover on its way to heaven, whilst her body lies dead upon the stage. This is the only mode in which the *voice from within, dying away,* can be accounted for. M. de Schlegel, however (in a private letter to me), says: "*Sie ist gerichtet* [she is judged], se rapporte à la sentence de mort prononcée par les juges; les mots suivants, *Sie ist gerettet* [she is saved], au salut de son âme." It has been contended that *Sie ist gerichtet* refers both to the judgment in heaven and to the judgment upon earth. As to the translation of the passage, no doubt can well exist, for *richten* is literally *to judge,* and is constantly used in the precise sense the above interpretation attributes to it; for instance, "*Die Lebendigen und die Todten zu richten*" (to judge the quick and the dead).

The habit, perhaps inevitable, of receiving the first impression of a drama or dramatic poem from the plot, is particularly unfavourable to 'Faust;' for the scenes hang loosely together, and unity of action is altogether wanting. As regards the main defect, it would be difficult to dispute the matured judgment of Coleridge speaking of the poem in 1833:—

"There is neither causation nor progression in the Faust: he is a ready-made conjuror from the very beginning. The *incredulus odi* is felt from the first line. The sensuality and the thirst after knowledge are unconnected with each other. Mephistopheles and Margaret are excellent; but Faust himself is dull and meaningless. The scene in Auerbach's Cellar is one of the best, perhaps the very best; that on the Brocken is also very fine; and all the songs are beautiful. But there is no whole in the poem; the scenes

are mere magic-lantern pictures; and a large part of the work is to me very flat. The German is very pure and fine."

The effect depends so much on the language, that, to be appreciated, the poem must be read and re-read in the original. When I printed my prose translation in January 1833, there was only one English translation of 'Faust' (the late Lord Ellesmere's), which was both inaccurate and incomplete. There are now more than forty English translations in verse, many by persons of taste, cultivation, and accomplishment; but the highest praise that can be justly claimed for the best is, that they approximate to the original in parts. The cause of such a succession of failures may be found in the nature of the task. It is only by a fortunate coincidence that the burning breathing words or idiomatic felicities of one language can ever be adequately represented in another. Add the exigencies of metre, and the difficulty becomes insuperable. The poetry of form cannot be transplanted. To quote a critic who was also a poet:—

"No poetical translation can give the rhythm and rhyme of the original; it can only substitute the rhythm and rhyme of the translator; and for the sake of this substitute we must renounce some portion of the original sense, and nearly all the expressions. . . . The sacred and mysterious union of thought with verse, twin-born and immortally wedded from the moment of their common birth, can never be understood by those who desire verse translations of good poetry."

Most of the genuine admirers of Goethe, if really interested in his fame, will agree with the author of the 'Legend of Doctor Faust,' that the First Part should have

remained a Fragment; that the last scene, with its sublimity and impressiveness, should have remained the last. "It had a fine effect, how Faust, in the manner of the spirits that flitted round him, disappeared—how mists veiled him from our sight, given over to inexorable Destiny, on whom, hidden from us, the duty of condemning or acquitting him devolved. The spell is now broken."

Such was not the author's opinion. He regarded the continuation with the same misplaced preference with which Milton regarded 'Paradise Regained,' and spoke of the altered mode of treatment as anticipated and resulting from the nature of the work:—

"I could not but wonder that none of those who undertook a continuation and completion of my 'Fragments' (the First Part) had lighted upon the thought seemingly so obvious, that the composition of a Second Part must necessarily elevate itself altogether away from the hampered sphere of the First, and conduct a man of such a nature into higher regions, under worthier circumstances. How I, for my part, had determined to essay this, lay silently before my own mind from time to time, exciting me to some progress; while from all and each, I carefully guarded my secret, still in hope of bringing the work to the wished-for issue."

This is quoted from the 'Kunst und Alterthum,' a periodical founded by him. In a letter to Meyer, dated Weimar, July 20, 1831, he writes:—

"I have now arranged the Second Part of 'Faust,' which, during the last four years, I have taken up again in earnest, filled up chasms and connected together the matter I had ready by me, from beginning to end.

"I hope I have succeeded in obliterating all difference between Earlier and Later.

"I have known for a long time what I wanted, and even how I wanted it, and have borne it about within me for so many years as an inward tale of wonder; but I only executed portions which from time to time peculiarly attracted me. The Second Part, then, must not and could not be so fragmentary as the First. The reason has more claim upon it, as has been seen in the part already printed. It has indeed at last required a most vigorous determination to work up the whole together in such a manner that it could stand before a cultivated mind. I therefore made a firm resolution that it should be finished before my birthday. And so it was; the whole lies before me, and I have only trifles to alter. And thus I seal it up; and then it may increase the specific gravity of my succeeding volumes, be they what they may.

"If it contains problems enough (inasmuch as, like the history of man, the last-solved problem ever produces a new one to solve), it will, nevertheless, please those who understand by a gesture, a wink, a slight indication. They will find in it more than I could give.

"And thus is a heavy stone now rolled over the summit of the mountain and down on the other side."

After tracing the mental process by which Goethe arrived at a marked preference of the ideal or abstract over the real and a resulting fondness for allegory, M. Scherer remarks that this "last manner" is evident in Wilhelm Meister's 'Wander Jähre' and the continuation of 'Faust.' "These two works may be said to be dead of a hypertrophy of reflection. They are a mere mass of symbols, hieroglyphics, sometimes even mystifications."[1] This is almost literally true of the continuation. There is nothing that can be called a plot; nothing of which an adequate notion can be

[1] Etudes Critiques de Littérature. Par Edmond Scherer. 1876.

conveyed by analysis or description. Scene follows scene, without order or connection, as in a pantomime or extravaganza; and the *dramatis personæ*, of whom there is an embarrassing number and variety, are mostly allegorical and symbolic characters, speaking a mythical language which is only intelligible to the initiated, and rarely repays the trouble of interpretation. The principal attraction consists in the spirit with which the lighter measures are struck off, and the beauty of the descriptive passages.

The finale or catastrophe, if it may be so called, is simply ridiculous. The scene is a high mountain. A cloud comes down and breaks apart: Faust steps forth and soliloquises: a seven-mile boot walks up; then another: then Mephistopheles, upon whose appearance the boots hurry off, and we see and hear no more of them. A dialogue takes place between Faust and Mephistopheles, in the course of which it appears that Faust has formed some new desire, which he tells Mephistopheles to guess. He guesses empire, pleasure, glory, but it is none of them: Faust has grown jealous of the daily encroachments of the sea, and his wish is step by step to shut it out. As this wish is uttered, the sound of trumpets is heard; the cause is explained by Mephistopheles. An emperor is advancing to encounter a rival, whom his ungrateful subjects have set up. Mephistopheles proposes to Faust to aid him, and gain from his gratitude the grant of a boundless extent of strand for their experiment. Three spirits are called up by Mephistopheles, in the guise of armed men, to assist. Faust joins the emperor's army and proffers him the aid of his men. The fight commences, and is won by the magical

assistance of Faust. He is rewarded by the required grant, and soon afterwards we find Mephistopheles acting as overseer to a set of workmen (earthly as well as unearthly, it would seem) employed in consummating Faust's wish of limiting the dominion of the waves. I shall give Faust's dying words literally:—

"*Faust.* A marsh extends along the mountain's foot, infecting all that is already won: to draw off the noisome pool —the last would be the crowning success; I lay open a space for many millions to dwell upon, not safely, it is true, but in free activity; the plain green and fruitful; men and flocks forthwith made happy on the newest soil, forthwith settled on the mound's firm base, which the eager industry of the people has thrown up. Here within, a land like Paradise; there without, the flood may rage up to the brim, and as it nibbles powerfully to shoot in, the community throngs to close up the openings. Yes, heart and soul am I devoted to this wish; this is the last resolve of wisdom. He only deserves freedom and life who is daily compelled to conquer them for himself; and thus here, hemmed round by danger, bring childhood, manhood, and old age, their well-spent years to a close. I would fain see such a busy multitude—stand upon free soil with free people. I might then say to the moment, 'Stay, thou art so fair!' The trace of my earthly days cannot perish in centuries. In the presentiment of such exalted bliss, I now enjoy the most exalted moment. (*Faust sinks back; the Lemures take him up and place him upon the ground.*)

Mephistopheles. No pleasure satisfies him, no happiness contents him; so is he ever in pursuit of changing forms: the last, the worst, the empty moment, the poor one wishes to hold it fast. He who withstood me so vigorously! Time has obtained the mastery; here lies the greybeard in the dust! The clock stands still!

Chorus. Stands still! It is as silent as midnight. The index-hand falls."

The angels descend, and a contest ensues between them and Mephistopheles, backed by his devils, for the soul of Faust. It is eventually won by the angels, who succeed by exciting the passions and so distracting the attention of Mephistopheles. They fly off, and he is left soliloquising thus:—

"*Mephistopheles* (*looking round*). But how? whither are they gone? Young as you are, you have overreached me. They have flown heavenwards with the booty; for this they have been nibbling at this grave! a great, singularly precious treasure has been wrested from me; the exalted soul which had pledged itself to me—this have they cunningly smuggled away from me. To whom must I now complain? Who will regain my fairly-won right for me? Thou art cheated in thy old days; thou hast deserved it; matters turn out fearfully ill for thee. I have scandalously mismanaged matters; a great outlay, to my shame, is thrown away; common desire, absurd amorousness, take possession of the outpitched devil. And if the old one, with all the wisdom of experience, has meddled in this childish, silly business, in truth it is no small folly which possesses him at the close."

The last scene is headed—"Mountain defiles—Forest—Rock—Desert." The characters introduced are Anchorites, Fathers, Angels, and a band of female Penitents, amongst whom we recognise Margaret rejoicing over the salvation of Faust.

This, we need hardly say, is no solution of the problem, and justifies a suspicion whether the prologue in heaven could have been in the author's mind either in the conception or completion of the work. Goethe was fond of mystifying his public; and there were moments when he indulged a quiet laugh at the commentators who insisted on discovering meanings in his writings which had never once occurred to him.

CHAPTER XXV.

INTERVIEW WITH NAPOLEON—REPUTATION IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND.

One of the most memorable events in Goethe's life was his reception at the Erfurt levee (October 2, 1808), which was flattering in the extreme. The first words addressed to him by Napoleon, after looking him all over, were, "Vous êtes un homme." When he left the room after a long interview, during which he had to listen patiently to a lecture on tragedy and a criticism on 'Werther,' the Emperor turned to Berthier and Daru and exclaimed, "Voilà un homme!" Shortly afterwards, at a court ball at Weimar, the Emperor again did him the honour of making him the recipient of some of his peculiar views on literature, expressed astonishment that so great a genius should admire Shakespeare instead of *les genres tranchés*, and suggested the Death of Cæsar as a subject on which he might base a finer work than any he had produced yet. A pressing invitation followed: "Venez à Paris, je l'exige de vous: là vous trouverez un cercle plus vaste pour votre esprit d'observation: là vous trouverez des matières immenses pour vos créations poétiques." If he had accepted this invitation, he would

have had no cause to complain of his reception amongst the French men of letters who had been brought familiarly acquainted with German literature by Madame de Staël. But widely different was the state of things in England till many years later. The first part of 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' was published in 1811; the second, in 1812; the third, in 1814; the fourth amongst the posthumous works. The three first parts were reviewed in the 'Edinburgh Review' for June 1816, and the second paragraph of the article begins:—

"The astonishing rapidity of the development of German literature has been the principal cause both of its imperfections and of the enthusiasm of its warmest admirers. About five-and-twenty or thirty years ago (1786-1791) all we knew about Germany was, that it was a vast tract of country, overrun with hussars and classical editors, and that if you went there you would see a great tun at Heidelberg and be regaled with excellent old Hock and Westphalia hams; *the taste for which good things was so predominant as to preclude the slightest approach to poetical grace or enthusiasm.* At that time we had never seen a German name affixed to any other species of writing than a treaty by which some Serene Highness or another had sold so many head of soldiers for American consumption, or to a formidable apparatus of critical annotation teeming with word-catching and Billingsgate in Latin and Greek."

The writer had obviously never heard of Klopstock, Herder, Wieland, Winckelman, Lessing, or Kant; and his impressions of Schiller, whom he pronounces the only writer of good prose, appear to have been vague in the extreme. To depreciate Goethe and turn him into ridicule was the special aim of the article: the authorship

of which is betrayed by a review of 'Wilhelm Meister' in the 'Edinburgh Review' for 1824; reprinted in the collected edition of Lord Jeffrey's Essays. The spirit, tone, amount of knowledge, and tendency are the same. The book is described as the acme of absurdity, coarseness, and vulgarity; but coming unexpectedly on some passages of indisputable excellence, including the criticism on 'Hamlet,' the reviewer relents a little towards the end, and charitably admits that 'Wilhelm Meister,' on the whole, is an object rather of wonder than contempt.

Goethe is reported, on no precise authority, to have printed a translation of the first of these articles with the heading, "This is what the English call Criticism." But they did not alter his feelings towards the English, nor shake the high estimate in which our principal writers were held by him. Byron and Scott were his favourites, and he dwelt with pleasure on the obligations under which, consciously or unconsciously, they lay to him.

"Walter Scott used a scene from my 'Egmont,' and he had a right to do so. I must praise him for the judicious manner in which he did it. He has also copied my 'Mignon,' in one of his romances; but whether he was equally judicious there, is another question. Lord Byron has borrowed from Mephistopheles; and why not? If he had gone further in search of originality, he would have fared worse. My Mephistopheles sings a song from Shakespeare: why should I give myself the trouble to compose one of my own, when this was perfectly suited to express my meaning? For the same reason, there is no fault to be found with any resemblance that may exist between the prologue to my 'Faust' and that to the history of Job."

Surely this is rather lax talking.

The fault of his recorded judgments of his contemporaries is, that they latterly became too indulgent. Shortly before he died, praise from him began to be regarded as a brevet of mediocrity. He actually praised Lord Ellesmere's and M. Gerard's translations of 'Faust.'

His intellectual activity never flagged. The 'West-östliche Divan,' a collection of poems on oriental subjects, sufficient to found a reputation, was published in 1819; the 'Wander Jähre,' in 1821. The 'Kunst und Alterthum,' established in 1816, was continued with unabated vigour till 1828. This was a periodical conducted by him the nature of which is indicated by the name. But the unabated eagerness with which he persevered in what he deemed the duty of self-culture is most strikingly shown by his resolute endeavours to comprehend music and master it as a science, although it may be doubted whether he was highly gifted by nature with that quality of ear which Dr Johnson wished for as "a new sense."

"Every morning [in the autumn of 1830] he had a music lesson. This consisted in Felix [Mendelssohn] playing to him for an hour pieces by all the great composers in chronological order, and then explaining what each had done to further the art. All the while he would sit in a dark corner like a Jupiter Tonans, with his old eyes flashing fire. At first he would not venture on Beethoven at all. But when Felix declared he could not help it, and played the first movement of the C minor Symphony, he remarked, 'That causes no emotion; it is only astonishing and grandiose:' and then, again, after muttering away to himself, he observed, 'That is very grand, quite wild, enough to bring

the house about one's ears; and what must it be when all the people are playing it at once?'"[1]

[1] 'Goethe and Mendelssohn' (1821-1831), p. 67. Johnson said of music, "It excites in my mind no ideas, and prevents me from contemplating my own." But not six months before his death he said to Dr Burney: "Burney, teach me at least the alphabet of your language." The year before his death, Coleridge expressed a wish to see an Italian opera—having, I believe, never seen one. His nephew (Henry Nelson) and I got a box and accompanied him. He watched the action with interest, and was pleased with the *mise en scène*, but confessed that the music gave him no pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD AGE AND DEATH.

THE best proof how long he retained his sensibility unimpaired was given when, in his seventy-fourth year, he fell in love with Fraulein von Lewezow, who returned his passion. About the same time, according to Zelter, Madame Szymanowska fell still more desperately in love with him: thus verifying the remark, that love is like fishing: the fish that hooks itself is most firmly hooked. "Le plus dangereux ridicule," says Rochefoucauld, "des vielles personnes qui ont été aimable, c'est d'oublier qu'elles ne le sont plus." But Goethe incurred little or no risk of ridicule: the result showed that he had not ceased to be *aimable* in ceasing to be young. Dazzled by the celebrity that encircled him like a halo, women never thought of his age. Gratified vanity is not without its influence; and the best of them love less through the senses than men. "Chez les hommes l'amour entre par les yeux; chez les femmes par les oreilles." When their imagination is caught, "they can transfigure brighter than a Raphael;" and Montrose struck a responsive chord when he told his mistress—

"I'll make thee famous by my pen,
And glorious by my sword."

A highly favourable impression of Goethe's affability, considerate kindness, and varied powers of conversation, may be collected from the notes and reminiscences of Eckermann, Soret, Falk, and Von Müller. But they were satellites revolving round their sun. His general manner was reserved, and not devoid of affectation. He did not unbend, except to the favoured few admitted to his intimacy or to those who came to pay him homage; and his retired habits the year before his death may be inferred from the fact that Thackeray, during a stay of some months in Weimar, only saw him three times, and was only once in the same room with him. Making due allowance for comic exaggeration, Heine's description of the effect of his personal appearance may be accepted as true in the main:—

"The accordance of personal appearance with genius, such as is required in extraordinary men, was conspicuous in Goethe. One might study Grecian art in him, as in an antique. His eyes were tranquil as those of a god. Time had been powerful enough to cover his head with snow, but not to bend it; he carried it ever proud and high: and when he spoke, he seemed to grow bigger; and when he stretched out his hand, it was as if he could prescribe, with his finger, to the stars in heaven the way they were to go. When I visited him in Weimar, and stood face to face with him, I looked involuntarily around in search of the eagle with the thunderbolts in his beak. I was on the very point of addressing him in Greek; but, so soon as I observed that he understood German, I related to him, in my own mother-tongue, that *the plums upon the road between Jena and Weimar tasted very nice.* So many long wintry nights had I thought it over—how many deep and sublime things I would say to

Goethe when I saw him: and when, at length, I did see him, I said to him—that Saxon plums tasted very nice! And Goethe smiled—he smiled with the same lips with which he had once kissed the fair Leda, Europa, Danaë, Semele, and so many other princesses and ordinary nymphs besides."

Although nearly half a century has elapsed since Goethe's death, his reputation, constantly on the increase, stands higher, and on a more solid foundation, at the present moment, than at any preceding period. No dissent was provoked by the lecturer who, addressing a cultivated Berlin audience, recently compared his influence on the spiritual atmosphere of Germany to that of a convulsion of the earth, which should raise the climate many degrees in warmth, enrich vegetation, improve the whole aspect of the land, and supply a new base of life. Nor has that influence been confined to Germany. Distinct signs of it have been recognised in the spiritual atmosphere of England, where, besides more temperate admirers, there exists a respectable school who swear by him. "The voices for Goethe," says Mr Carlyle, "compared with those against him, are in the proportion, as we reckon them, both as to number and value, of perhaps a hundred to one. We take in, not Germany alone, but France and Italy—not the Schlegels and Schillings, but the Manzonis and De Staëls."

The only voices against him worth counting were those raised on the score of his want of public spirit. He contrasts most disadvantageously with Schiller in this respect. He had none of the intense hatred of wrong which made Swift exclaim, "Do not the villanies of mankind make your blood boil?" He had no broad

expansive philanthropy, no sympathy with self-sacrificing virtue or heroism. The enthusiasm of united Germany for independence when the Napoleonic grasp was beginning to relax, rather annoyed than gratified him; and he condemned the impulse which carried Byron to Greece. His absorbing interest, Archimedes-like, in his own pursuits, is illustrated by M. Soret in a note dated August 2, 1830:—

"The news of the revolution of July reached Weimar today, and set all in movement. I ran to Goethe. 'Now,' he called out to me, 'what do you think of this great event? The volcano is come to the eruption: all is in flames, and it is no longer a transaction within closed doors.'

"'A fearful history,' I replied. 'But what was to be expected under the known circumstances, and with such a ministry, but that it would end by the expulsion of the royal family?'

"'We appear not to understand each other, my good fellow,' replied Goethe. 'I am not speaking of these people; my concern is with totally different things. I am speaking of the contest, so important to science, between Cuvier and Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire, having come to an open rupture in the Academy.'"

This contest related to the scientific discovery on which he most prided himself. Let any ardent follower of science or art place himself in the same position, and say honestly how he would have felt under the circumstances. Would not Professor Tyndall be more interested by hearing that the Institute had just crowned or upset his theory of heat than by being told that Marshal MacMahon had turned the Chamber of Deputies out of doors? Would not Sir Julius Benedict be more excited by the success of a new opera than by

the upset of a dynasty? It is quite natural that they should. But the man of science, or artist, wrapped up in his vocation, must not be confounded with the champions of liberty, the martyrs of religion, or the large-hearted, high-minded benefactors of mankind.

Self-culture was Goethe's paramount object through life, and intellectual egotism the normal condition of his mind. In the course of a discussion on Beranger's songs, he expressed an opinion that, "in general, a purely poetical subject is as superior to a political one as the pure everlasting truth of nature is to party spirit." But he was not wanting in the milk of human kindness on occasions; and, except when his mental progress or tranquillity was interrupted or disturbed, he accepted the common view of the relative importance of subjects and events. Mr Lewes has a chapter headed "The Real Philanthropist," based on the somewhat narrow foundation of Goethe's persevering course of generosity and forbearance towards one man. Goethe himself has recorded the offence given him by Madame de Staël when, after announcing the death of Moreau in whom he had long taken a deep interest, she turned the conversation to indifferent subjects, and called him *maussade* for not keeping it up with spirit. "I was now angry in earnest, and told her she was incapable of any real feeling or sympathy—that she burst in upon me, knocked me down with a dreadful blow, and then required that I should be ready to pipe my tune the next instant, and to hop from one object to the other."

Goethe's title to the exalted place assigned to him amongst poets must rest mainly, if not exclusively, on

'Faust.' It is not a perfect poem, but it is one which only the highest order of genius could have produced. There are things in it which dive as deep, and soar as high, into the infinite unknown, as the human mind can reach. The range and variety are marvellous. He has acted literally on the hint thrown out by the manager in the prologue: "So tread, in this narrow booth, the whole circle of creation; and travel, with considerate speed, from Heaven, through the World, to Hell."[1] The divine is set off by the diabolical, and the mocking irony enhances the effect of the sublime. Johnson's couplet is as applicable to the author of 'Faust' as to the author of 'Hamlet' and 'Lear:'—

> "Creation saw him spurn her bounded reign,
> And panting Time toiled after him in vain."

There is no other work of Goethe which can be called first-rate of its kind; but take them all together, and where shall we find a richer cluster, a brighter constellation, of poetry, romance, science, art, philosophy, and thought? "Goethe," observes Madame de Staël, "should not be criticised as an author good in one kind of composition and bad in another. He rather resembles nature, which produces all and *of* all; and we can prefer in him his climate of the south to his climate of the north, without disregarding in him the talents which harmonise with these different regions of the soul." In whichever

[1] The last time the drama was acted at Weimar, the stage was divided into three storeys or compartments, one above the other; Mephistopheles (in the first act) occupying the lower, Faust the central one, and the Lord (represented by a voice) the highest.

of these regions we encounter him, we recognise a master-mind; and without pretending to fix his precise place amongst the greatest poets, we do not hesitate to declare him the most splendid specimen of cultivated intellect ever manifested to the world.

Goethe died on the 22d March 1832. His last articulate words were, "*More Light.*"

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